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Vincent Perez takes over the horror franchise from late Crow Brandon Lee

the CROW
city of angels

D. Voigt

THE FRIGHTENERS

ESCAPE FROM L.A.

JAPANIMATION'S "GHOST IN THE SHELL"

Volume 28 Number 1

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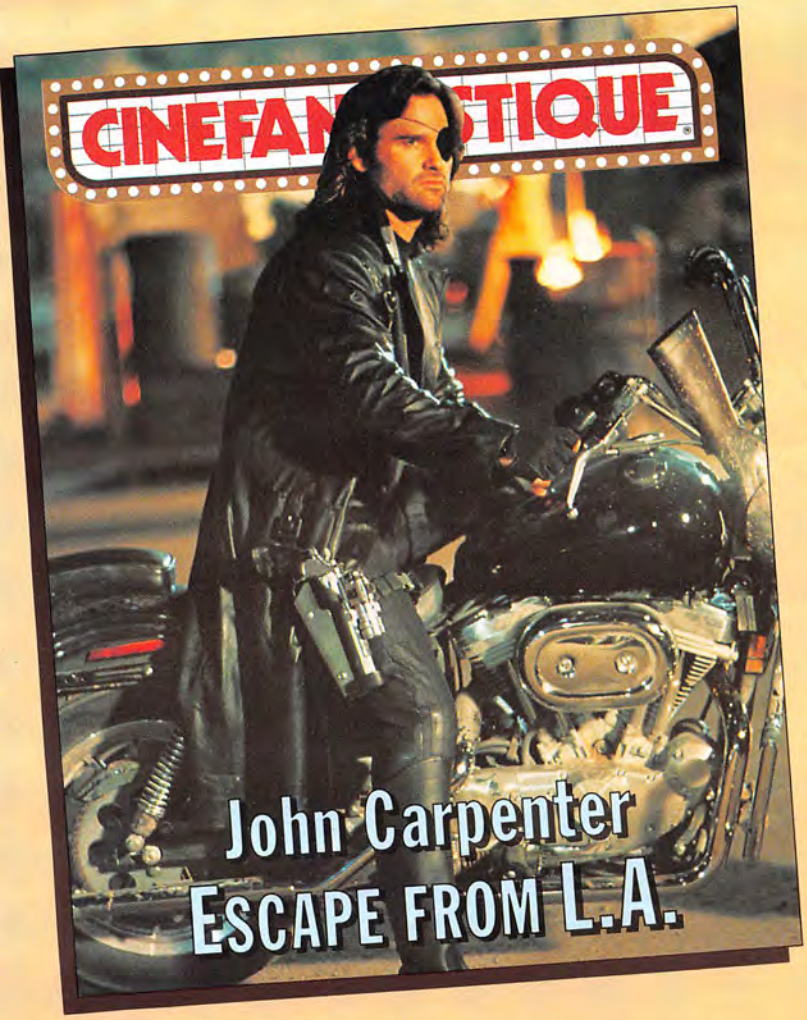

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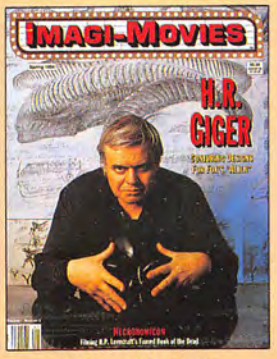

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CINEFANTASTIQUE

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CINEMAGINATION

Have you ever wondered about those quotes in movie ads—you know, the ones from critics singing praises of glory as if the film were a major event in cinema history? Well, there is reason to wonder, as you will see if you turn to the capsule reviews page this issue and examine Dan Cziraky's commentary on BARB WIRE. You will notice that it doesn't conform to the quote that appeared in Gramercy Pictures' newspaper and television ads, attributed to another writer at *Cinefantastique*.

What's the story? Did Gramercy just make up the quote? No, the quote is legitimate: the writer in question did say it. However, there's the rub: he *said* it; he did not *write* it in any review published in this magazine. Rather, these days, a distribution company seeking copy for its ads will screen a film for journalists with the understanding that they are looking for favorable comments. After the screening, the company will call the journalists, who—if they are so inclined—can provide a quote over the phone.

There is nothing wrong with this. We all have opinions, and if we enjoy a film, it is only natural that we want our opinions to influence others to enjoy the film as well. What's misleading is that, because most film reviewers (outside of Siskel and Ebert) are not very famous in their own right, the ad inevitably includes not only the name of the speaker but also the name of the publication where he or she works. The implication is that the quote has been pulled from a complete review printed in that publication. Thus, in a case like this, you have *CFQ* endorsing BARB WIRE—when in actual fact its published review is rather critical of the film. This is a bit misleading—though not, strictly speaking, dishonest. It is just another clever way Hollywood has of tilting the odds in its favor. After all, if the writer assigned to review a film doesn't like it, there's bound to be another writer at the publication who honestly does. As always, let the buyer beware.

Steve Biodrowski

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EAGERLY AWAITED

THE ISLAND OF DR. MOREAU (New Line)

Pleased by the footage seen in dailies, New Line Cinema has pushed up the release of the third cinematic version of H.G. Wells' THE ISLAND OF DR. MOREAU, previously scheduled for October. Director John Frankenheimer (THE MANCHURIAN CANDIDATE) took over when Richard Stanley (DUST DEVIL) was fired due to his unstable production methods. Legendary Marlon Brando takes on the role previously played by Charles Laughton in 1932 and Burt Lancaster in 1977—that of Moreau, who works his medical magic on wild beasts to make them more like men. Val Kilmer (BATMAN FOREVER), David Thewlis (NAKED), Fairuza Balk (THE CRAFT), and Ron Perlman (BEAUTY AND THE BEAST) round out the human cast, with Stan Winston's makeup and Digital Domain's CGI helping the good doctor do his deeds. "I'd call this a moral fable," said Frankenheimer. "By that I mean, what happens when you let these scientists go unchecked? In *Time* magazine a while ago, there was a picture of a mouse on which they grew a human ear. Sometimes they just go too far. Then also the question of playing God—that's the theme of this picture." **Fred Szebin**

August 23

RELEASE SCHEDULE

Upcoming cinefantastique at a glance, along with a word or two for the discriminating viewer.

compiled by Jay Stevenson (unless otherwise noted)

THE ADVENTURES OF PINOCCHIO (New Line) July 26

Director Steve Barron promises that this live-action film will be closer to Carlo Colodi's original tale than the Disney animated feature. Martin Landau stars, with Genevieve Bujold, Udo Kier, and Jonathan Taylor Thomas as the voice of the puppet, which was created by Jim Henson's Creature Shop. SEE PAGE 28.

THE CROW: CITY OF ANGELS (Dimension) August 2

QUEEN MARGOT's Vincent Perez makes his U.S. debut in the title role of this sequel to the 1994 adaptation of J.O'Barr's Gothic graphic novel. SEE PAGE 16.

ESCAPE FROM L.A. (Paramount) Aug 9

Kurt Russell, now a box office star thanks to STARGATE and EXECUTIVE DECISION, returns as the one-eyed Plissken ("Call me Snake") in this follow-up to John Carpenter's 1979 cult science-fiction hit. SEE PAGE 32.

THE FRIGHTENERS (Universal) July 19

Originally scripted for Robert Zemeckis as a TALES FROM THE CRYPT movie, this Peter Jackson-directed horror-comedy reaches screens a month before BORDELLO OF BLOOD. SEE PAGE 8.

INDEPENDENCE DAY (Fox) July 3

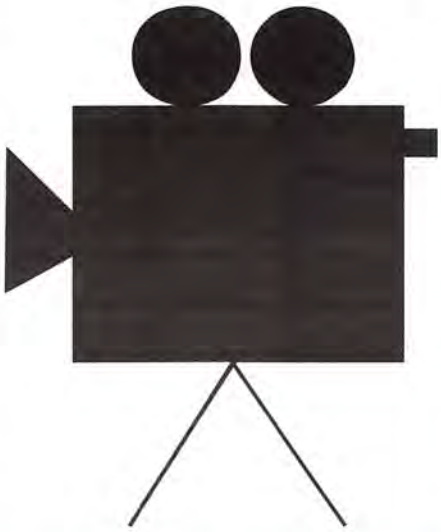
The summer's science-fiction blockbuster is detonating screens near you. But will it top TWISTER? And can the producer-director team of Dean Devlin and Roland Emmerich make a better GODZILLA movie than Jan DeBont would have? SEE PAGES 6 AND 14.

JACK (Hollywood) August 7

Robin Williams stars in the title role for director Francis Coppola. The script posits a character who appears to be an average 40-year-old man—who plays with G.I. Joe dolls and wears Power Rangers pajamas. Actually, Jack is only 10; he suffers from a genetic disorder that causes premature aging. Long protected by his parents from a world they fear won't understand him, Jack embarks on the adventure of his life when he enters the fourth grade.

JOE'S APARTMENT (Warner) July 26

CGI brings singing, dancing cockroaches to life in this live-action feature adapted from a short which appeared on MTV. SEE PAGE 10.



KAZAAM (Walt Disney) July 17

Shaquille O'Neal stars as the titular genie in this family-oriented fantasy, directed and conceived by Paul Michael Glaser (who used to play Starsky—or was it Hutch?—on the old buddy-cop TV show before turning to a directing career that includes such genre credits as THE RUNNING MAN and the made for-TV AMAZONS). 12-year-old Max (Francis Capra) is beset by a variety of apparently unsolvable problems (divorced parents, local bullies) until he opens a battered boombox, freeing Kazaam. SEE PAGE 7.

MATILDA (Tri-Star) August 2

Matilda is an extraordinary girl of wondrous intelligence. Unfortunately, her deeply stupid parents, Harry and Zinnia Wormwood, can barely tolerate what little time they do spend with her. When they finally give in and send Matilda to school, it's to Crunchem Hall, which is ruthlessly ruled by principal Agatha Trunchbull, a hulking woman as awful as her name. however, Matilda's fortune turns when her first grade teacher Miss Honey begins to believe in her; she discovers that she possesses the most extraordinary psychic powers—which can make trouble for the monstrous grown-ups in her life and help gain freedom for Matilda and her oppressed friends. Danny DeVito, Rhea Perlman, Embeth Davidtz, and Mara Wilson star. Nicholas Kazan & Robin Swicord adapted the Roald Dahl book for DeVito, who also directed and co-produced. Let's hope it turns out better than JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH!

MULTIPLICITY (Columbia) July 12

Director Harold Ramis' cloning comedy stars Michael Keaton as Doug Kinney, a man who has himself cloned in order to meet the conflicting demands of work and family. With Andie MacDowell. SEE CFQ 27:11-12.

PHENOMENON (Touchstone) July 3

John Travolta stars as George Malley, a regular guy whose life is turned upside down when he is struck by a blinding white light on his 37th birthday. Suddenly, George has a newfound intelligence and an insatiable appetite for learning that is rapidly turning him into a genius. Scientists want to study him; the military wants to use him; and people from around the country seek his counsel. His neighbors, on the other hand, scared off by the change he has undergone, turn their backs on him. Kyra Sedgwick, Robert Duvall, and Forest Whitaker round out the cast. Jon Turteltaub directs, from a script by Gerald DiPego. SEE PAGE 12.

RAINBOW (Allegro) July 26 (foreign)

Director Bob Hoskin's children's fantasy (mentioned in last issue's Release Schedule) reaches Canadian and overseas screens this month, but still no U.S. distribution is set.

WORTH THE WAIT?

BORDELLO OF BLOOD (Universal)

Pushed back from a February release, the new CRYPT flick tells of a beautiful, blood-thirsty vampire queen named Lilith, who presides over a brothel where sexy working-ghouls fulfill men's fantasies." The catch, of course, is that the blood is the only form of payment accepted by these undead beauties. When detective Rafe Guttman (Dennis Miller) takes on the case of Bible-toting Katherine Verdoux (Erika Eleniak)'s missing brother, the trail leads not only to Lilith (Angie Everhart) but to Reverend Current (Chris Sarandon), the originator of the demonic plot to wipe out sin by installing Lilith as the madam of the Bordello of Blood. Making his feature-directing debut is Gil Adler, who produced DEMON KNIGHT and HBO's TALES FROM THE CRYPT series. The script was written by Adler & A.L. Katz, from an old unfilmed script by Bob Gale & Robert Zemeckis (who receive story credit here).

August 16

HOLLYWOOD GOTHIC

GAMERA INVADES U.S.

Theatrical release will precede video; new sequel already in production.

by Steve Ryfle

For the first time in more than a decade, a Japanese giant-monster movie will be released to U.S. theaters later this year, but it won't be Godzilla who does the romping and stomping. Houston-based A.D. Vision, a distributor of Japanese animated films, has bought the U.S. rights to GAMERA, GUARDIAN OF THE UNIVERSE, the 1995 film starring the world's greatest flying gigantic turtle. The company plans a fairly ambitious theatrical run sometime in the fall, followed by cable TV and video releases.

But there's even more good news for fans of the Superturtle: In Tokyo, Daiei Co. Ltd. has just begun post-production on the forthcoming follow-up to Gamera's comeback film. Tentatively titled GAMERA 2: RAYGION ATTACKS, the sequel pits Gamera against an all-new insectoid monster of alien origin that sows the seeds of global invasion by preying on the Earth's ecosystem, which has been damaged by mankind's polluting ways. Like last year's entry, the film is being produced with a budget of about $5 million, but there will reportedly be even more computer-generated effects and overall monster mayhem this time out.

The giant fire-breathing turtle will be marching onto our shores sometime this fall, in a dubbed version of GAMERA, GUARDIAN OF THE UNIVERSE.

In spite, or perhaps because of its adherence to traditional Japanese SFX techniques like "suitmation" and miniature cities, GAMERA, GUARDIAN OF THE UNIVERSE was the best Japanese giant-monster movie in more than 20 years, surpassing the new Godzillas in sheer excitement and even, at times, special effects. But according to sources close to the project, the new film will be even better.

"In this film, we are trying to develop the character of Gamera, not just make another big monster movie," special effects director Shinji Higuchi said. "It is assumed that Gamera is a hero who is fighting for mankind, but we're trying to show what his real purpose is, what he's really fighting for."

In addition to Higuchi, the entire creative team behind the first film (which received wide critical acclaim in Japan) has returned to work on GAMERA 2. The film is slated for a June or July release in Tokyo. □

Production Starts

THE EIGHTH DAY

Ethan Hawke, Uma Thurman, Alan Arkin, and Gore Vidal appear in this science-fiction effort produced by Danny DeVito for Columbia Pictures. Andrew Niccol writes and directs.

MICHAEL

Over-rated Nora Ephron, whose last effort, MIXED NUTS, tanked, goes back behind the camera, directing her rewrite of a script by Pete Dexter and Jim Quinlan, about a cynical reporter who tracks down the archangel Michael, who has fallen to Earth and become an alcoholic. Top-flight cast includes John Travolta, William Hurt, Andie MacDowell, Jean Stapleton, Bob Hoskins, and Teri Garr. By the way, did we mention that it is a romantic comedy?

PRINCE VALIANT

The comic book Arthurian fantasy comes to the big screen, courtesy of producer Bernd Eichinger (known to genre fans for the aborted FANTASTIC FOUR). Anthony Hickox directs, from a script co-written with Carsten Lorenz. With: Stephen Moyer, Katherine Heigi, Thomas Kretschmann, Ron Perlman, Udo Kier, and Warwick Davis.

continued on next page

Short Notes

The as-if-we-needed-it Mick Garris remake of Universal's THE MUMMY has apparently unraveled; maybe someone finally realized that Kharis was always the also-ran in the Universal Monster Sweepstakes. That hasn't stopped two other projects in development with the same title. **Michael Almereyda**, who scored an art house hit with NADJA last year, is set to do a version for Trimark, (very) loosely based on Bram Stoker's *Jewel of the Seven Stars*. In the updated plot, a woman battling substance abuse encounters a mummified Druid, who may be an ancestor of hers. Meanwhile, 20th Century-Fox just shelled out $3 million for the **Anne Rice** novel, *The Mummy, or Ramses the Damned*—a project long rumored as a possible James Cameron effort, back when the now-bankrupt Carolco owned the rights. The sale catapults Rice into the upper echelon of authors highly paid by Hollywood, just behind John Grisham and Michael Crichton. □

MARS ATTACKS —an update

by Todd Baesen

Judging from the high-powered cast assembled for MARS ATTACKS!, Warner Bros will spend more on above-the-line costs than the entire budget of Tim Burton's previous movie, ED WOOD. Jack Nicholson stars in dual roles, playing both the U.S. President and a sleazy Las Vegas real estate broker who is working on the biggest deal of his life. Nicholson will be supported by Glenn Close, as First Lady Marsha Dale, and Annette Bening as Barbara Snyder, a recovering alcoholic who is constantly at-odds with the crass ways of her hustling husband and is now embracing a holistic life style. Bening was Burton's first choice for Cat Woman, before her pregnancy forced her to relinquish the role.

Michael J. Fox co-stars as the President's womanizing press secretary, who falls for an attractive woman—really a disguised Martian assassin attempting to charm her way into the White House. Rod Steiger is the military hawk, General Decker, who disagrees with the President's "peace and love policy" toward the Martian invaders, claiming, "George Bush would never let this happen to America."

Pierce Brosnan is Professor Donald Kessler, a British scientist who argues that the Martians are "peaceful and enlightened," and that "it is the human race that is an aggressive species." Sara Jessica Parker portrays Nathalie Lake, an MTV reporter who scores a coup by interviewing Kessler and is later abducted, along with the professor, aboard a Martian spacecraft.

Singer Tom Jones will play himself, banding with a group of Las Vegas refugees who attempt to commandeer a plane and flee from the devastated city, now infested by hostile Martians. Jim Brown will portray an ex-heavyweight boxer who leads the small group of survivors in their valiant attempt to escape from Las Vegas.

Despite extensive CGI, one effect that won't be faked is the destruction of Howard Hughes' Landmark Hotel. The 32-story structure was scheduled for demolition, and Burton captured it on film last November, to be used in the movie as an example of the destructive force of the Martian death rays. □

GODZILLA GREENLIGHTED

Roland Emmerich and Dean Devlin take over dormant project for TriStar.

by Steve Ryfle and Steve Biodrowski

TriStar pictures has announced that their long-dormant Americanization of Japan's King of the Monsters is about to get up-and-stomping, under the reins of the partnership responsible for this summer's INDEPENDENCE DAY. The signing of Roland Emmerich and Dean Devlin is a good step for TriStar, which bought rights to Nippon's legendary lizard back in 1992, but lost momentum after director Jan DeBont (SPEED) bowed out in December 1994.

DeBont left the project because he was unable to convince studio heads to cough up the $120 million that it would cost to create an all-digital Godzilla. "It was unfortunately a little too expensive," said DeBont of his departure, "though I hope they're still going to make the movie because I really think it's a great script, and it will be a great movie ultimately—as long as they do not cut out Godzilla! That's what I'm always afraid of at studios: 'It's too expensive—let's cut out more of Godzilla, let's cut out more effects shots!' And I say, 'Well, that's the leading star of the movie, and you're going to cut him out? Just leave a blue screen in there?' That's what tends to happen."

DeBont's GODZILLA was to be crafted from a script by Terry Rossio and Ted Elliott, in which Godzilla was a guardian created eons ago and placed in suspended animation by an advanced, now extinct civilization (shades of GAMERA, GUARDIAN OF THE UNIVERSE!). When Earth is threatened by an alien monster called the Gryphon, Godzilla reawakens to duke-it-out with the invader on the streets of Manhattan.

TriStar's long-dormant GODZILLA will be reawakening under a new production team. The character hasn't been seen on U.S. screens since GODZILLA 1985.

But forget all that. Devlin says he and Emmerich will co-write an entirely new script, although story details are not yet forthcoming. "We have a story idea that we want to pursue for GODZILLA, but we really haven't had time to work on it," said Devlin in May, while busy completing INDEPENDENCE DAY. "It would be a completely different version from the one Jan DeBont nearly did. We're not even rewriting those scripts; we're starting from scratch. We want to go back to the original Godzilla movie and build from that.

"We're huge fans of Godzilla," continued Devlin. "We think it's an opportunity to do a really enormous film, to take it beyond what anyone has imagined could be done with Godzilla. We'd like to make a Godzilla that's meaner, faster, wilder than anything seen before. But there is not a script yet, and there's a long road to go."

Devlin said he and Emmerich want to eradicate the campy image of Godzilla that resulted from the decline of the original Toho series in the '70s. They hope to replace it with a new one that can be taken seriously by science-fiction fans—even those who aren't die-hard Godzilla buffs. "Our general approach to Godzilla is to do it straight, not to do a tongue-in-cheek version, not to camp it up or make fun of it, but to say, 'What if it were to really happen?'"

Although no budget has been set, Devlin said that GODZILLA, tentatively scheduled for a summer 1998 release, will be brought in for well under $100 million. In the past year, rumors had circulated that TriStar was even considering man-in-a-suit effects, a la the Toho movies, as a way of paring down the astronomical budget. Devlin dismisses that idea, saying that the monster will be created with a combination of puppetry and models, enhanced with computer animation when needed. The cityscapes to be destroyed by the monster's rampage will likely involve more expert modeling of the type employed in INDEPENDENCE DAY. "We'll do the same mixture of low- to high-tech effects. We make our determination shot by shot. With any particular shot, we say, 'What is the best technique for this?'—rather than just saying wholesale, 'Everything has to be CGI, which is the approach they took on [DeBont's] GODZILLA.That's why

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Production Starts

continued from previous page

STARSHIP TROOPERS

The fate of TriStar's Robert Heinlein adaptation, scripted and directed, respectively, by the ROBOCOP team of Ed Neumeier and Paul Verhoeven, was in doubt due to budget considerations (estimated cost: $95 million). Then Disney stepped in, putting up half the money in exchange for international distribution.

SCARY MOVIE

Wes Craven directs his first film for Dimension films, the Miramax division dedicated to genre production (if you can call releasing lame sequels like HALLOWEEN 6 and HELLRAISER 4 "dedicated"). Fortunately, this is an original piece, scripted by Kevin Williamson and starring Drew Barrymore.

Obituaries

by Jay Stevenson

Saul Bass

The graphic designer, storyboard artist, and film-credits maestro died on April 25 of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. He was 75. Bass provided striking credit sequences for numerous films, including Alfred Hitchcock's PSYCHO (1960), for which he also storyboarded the famous shower scene. At the time his only feature-length directing credit (the science-fiction film PHASE IV) was released, Bass garnered considerable publicity for himself by claiming that he had not only storyboarded the PSYCHO shower scene but directed it as well—a claim refuted by everyone else who worked on the film. Nevertheless, his contribution to the sequence is irrefutable, making it one of the most memorable scenes of horror in the genre.

Donald Cammell

The 57-year-old writer-director died of a self-inflicted bullet wound on April 23. Although he contributed to numerous scripts, Cammell directed only four films in his career, including the renowned 1970 psychedelic cult film PERFORMANCE (co-directed with Nicolas Roeg), the science-fiction effort DEMON SEED (1977), and the well-received thriller WHITE OF THE EYE (1987). According to published accounts of his death, he was despondent because his latest effort, WILD SIDE, a sexual thriller with Christopher Walken and Joan Chen, had been re-edited by production company Nulmage to premier on cable television rather than be released theatrically. Cammell had removed his name as director, although he retained co-script credit along his wife, China.

William K. Everson

The film historian, archivist, and teacher died in April at age 67. The author of *Classics of the Horror Film*, he was also influential in the preservation and restoration of such silent genre classics as THE LOST WORLD (1925).

Herk Harvey

The industrial filmmaker, known to horror fans for his cult effort CARNIVAL OF SOULS, died on April 3 at the age of 71. Harvey's only feature, released in 1962, became a perennial late-night TV favorite, which underwent a revival of sorts in 1990 when it played festivals and art houses to favorable reviews. □

KAZAAM

Hoop star Shaquille O'Neal leaps into his first movie role.

Preview by Sean Strebin

KAZAAM is a fantasy about a 12-year-old boy named Max (Francis Capra, of A BRONX TALE) who is granted three wishes by a genie whom he releases from a boom box. Basketball star Shaquille O'Neal plays the eponymous genie, with Ally Walker (UNIVERSAL SOLDIER) as Max's mother. The special effects were handled by Rhythm and Hues. The film was produced by Scott Kroopf, Bob Engleman, and Paul Michael Glaser, who also directed. Walt Disney releases the film on July 17.

For Glaser, KAZAAM represents a step away from simply directing someone else's material, as he did on such previous films as THE RUNNING MAN, with Arnold Schwarzenegger. "KAZAAM is the first film I created," he explained. "This is my first time out as a filmmaker, as opposed to being a director-for-hire."

Recalling the film's genesis, Glaser added, "I was taking my son to the NBA All-Star game, when an acquaintance, who's on Shaquille O'Neal's management team, called and asked if my son would like to meet him. I said, 'Of course.' She asked, in passing, if I knew of any film roles for Shaquille. I replied, 'He should play a genie.' I hung up the phone, and had this idea. In a very short time, I set KAZAAM up at Warner Brothers. They had the Michael Jordan project [SPACE JAM], so I took KAZAAM from there, and went back to Interscope, where I had already done two pictures. I had to have a screenplay and a green light in ten and a half weeks, or I wouldn't be able to make the movie—Shaquille had to go back to basketball camp. So the writers and I banged out a script in six and a half weeks. In ten and a half weeks from the time I had the idea, I had a green light."

The director had no problem working with his seven-foot-two novice movie star. "I never related to him as a basketball player; I related to him in terms of his ability to have fun and come from his heart," said Glaser, who had nothing but praise for Shaquille's performance. "There's a moment at the end where the genie wishes he could give up his heart for the boy, so the boy could fulfill his heart's desire. The genie gives up his own chance for freedom. Shaquille is quite good in the film. I'm very pleased."

Top: Shaquille O'Neal, as the genie Kazaam, displays a little bit of Rhythm and Hues effects magic. Inset: Paul Michael Glaser (formerly of STARSKY AND HUTCH) directs Francis Capra.

Glaser also had praise for Rhythm and Hues' effects, which he wanted to support the storyline without drawing attention to themselves. "They handled a lot of things really well," said the director. "Shaquille's entrance into the film is excellent. What I tried to do was a created a reality-based effects picture. I wanted the emotions of the characters and the situations they were in to be real. I was trying to get the effects to come from an 'organic' place. That is to say, they are not effects for the effects. Rather, the effects were supportive of the story. I don't know to what extent I was successful in doing that, but that's what I tried to do."

Glaser concluded, "It's got a lot of heart, this film. I'm so close to the picture now that I don't know how much objectivity I have. I think KAZAAM has a valuable message. Hopefully, people will be moved by it and enjoy it. I think the film has something to say; at least, it does from my point of view. How the film communicates it, is up for the public to judge." □

THE FRIGHTENERS

Michael J. Fox scares up business as a psychic scam artist for Peter Jackson.

By Alan Jones

THE FRIGHTENERS is the latest spectre spectacular from New Zealand director Peter Jackson. After the gleeful low-budget gross-outs BAD TASTE, MEET THE FEEBLES and BRAINDEAD/DEAD ALIVE, the cult Kiwi director turned to real-life horror with the critically acclaimed, Oscar-nominated HEAVENLY CREATURES. Now he's gone back to his ghoulish roots with a haunting story originally written for director Robert Zemeckis as one of the TALES FROM THE CRYPT film series.

Michael J. Fox stars as psychic R.I.P.-off artist Frank Bannister, a ghostbuster on expensive hire to apparitionally-challenged households in the small town of Fairwater. Unbeknownst to his grateful clients, he's in cahoots with the very spooks he's paid to exterminate, and after the locals uncover his sleazy scheme, no one believes he's not behind the malevolent high spirits being caused by a rather nasty serial killer from beyond the grave. Rounding out the cast are Trini Alvaredo (LITTLE WOMEN), THE ADDAMS FAMILY's John Astin ("heavily disguised under Rick Baker's makeup," said Jackson), Jeffrey Combs (REANIMATOR), and Dee Wallace Stone (E.T.). Universal releases the film on July 19.

Director Peter Jackson poses with star Michael J. Fox on the set of THE FRIGHTENERS.

THE FRIGHTENERS began as a two-page story outline that Jackson and Frances Walsh, Jackson's wife and scripting partner, wrote around the time they were working on the HEAVENLY CREATURES script. Jackson said, "We literally dreamed it up one day when we were walking to the corner store to buy some milk! The germ of the idea was, 'What if there was this guy living in town who claimed to be a psychic and what if everybody thought he was a con-man who preyed on people at funerals claiming he could contact the recently deceased?' Our first twist was finding out he was actually real, because he lived with a bunch of ghosts. Then our second twist confirmed the fact he was a con-man, because he used his ghostly friends to haunt people's houses and scare up business for himself.

"We first thought about THE FRIGHTENERS as a possible spec script for us to sell, not for me to direct" he continued. "So rather than waste time writing a full screenplay, we asked our agent in Los Angeles to stick the outline on file until we had some proper interest. Then our agent responded to a call from Robert Zemeckis, who was gearing up to direct a TALES FROM THE CRYPT movie. The plan, four years ago anyway, was for him, Walter Hill, and Richard Donner to direct a movie each based on their success producing the HBO series. Apparently, Hill and Donner had their scripts, but Zemeckis was hunting around for ideas. He read THE FRIGHTENERS, liked it and asked to meet us."

This was in January 1993 while Jackson was in the middle of a BRAINDEAD publicity tour. "At this meeting, Zemeckis officially asked us to write the script," recalled Jackson. "We told him were were busy going into preproduction on HEAVENLY CREATURES and couldn't guarantee exactly when we'd be able to write it. That was okay, because Zemeckis himself was off to direct FORREST GUMP. Anyway, roughly a year later we gave him the completed script. We'd finally gotten around to it while editing HEAVENLY CREATURES in early 1994."

But things had changed on the TALES FROM THE CRYPT movie front in the interim, and when Zemeckis got back to Jackson after reading the script, it was with an entirely different offer in mind. Jackson

Fox, who had worked with exec producer Robert Zemeckis in the BACK TO THE FUTURE films, explores a haunted house with Trini Alvaredo.

Left: Michael J Fox plays a con-man in league with the ghosts he's supposed to bust. However, when the con is uncovered, he and his ghostly friends are blamed for a legitimate haunting (above).

said, "He asked me if I'd like to direct it instead while he produced. This was the first time the idea had ever been discussed. We had always written the script with the view that Bob was going to direct it. That's why it was set in small-town America and crafted for the American market with a no-apologies commercial slant. I would be lying if I said an emotional attachment to the script hadn't grown as I was writing it, but I kept telling myself not to get too involved. However, the fact that I jumped at the chance of directing obviously meant I had fallen hopelessly in love with it."

Nobody had seen HEAVENLY CREATURES, least of all Zemeckis, when he made Jackson the offer, "But he had seen BRAINDEAD and MEET THE FEEBLES, which he liked a lot," said the director. "Suddenly, THE FRIGHTENERS became a project we were doing as opposed to a script we had taken over a year to write. I think it took a while to finish because it was vital we got the interaction and relationships between Frank and the ghosts absolutely right and believable. I was insistent on filming in New Zealand and, to convince Universal it would be viable, sent loads of photographs of American-looking towns and locations. The decision to film in New Zealand cut the budget by half at least."

And that budget-paring helped Jackson get the go-ahead from Universal for one main reason, as he explained: "THE FRIGHTENERS is the longest shoot Universal has ever green-lit in the history of the studio. I'm sure WATERWORLD became a much longer shoot eventually, but they didn't set out from the beginning to do that. Universal knew from the outset that I wanted 125 days—from May to December 1995—to get this in the can. The final tally was around 130 days actually but...I had to have all that time because the movie used complicated motion control camerawork and was basically shot twice. Michael J. Fox did all his scenes first; a few months later our ghost actors repeated them; and then both blue screen shots were locked together. I wanted to achieve the ghosts in the traditional transparent way and not make them too special-effectsy. But, God, it was a technical nightmare. Nothing remarkable or ground-breaking, just ultra-painstaking."

All the interiors and special effects work were carried out at Jackson's newly built Camperdown Studios in the Wellington suburb of Miramar. As special effects designer Richard Taylor (a Jackson movie veteran) supervised the prosthetics and numerous miniatures, Jackson also expanded the computer effects facility he set up for HEAVENLY CREATURES. He said, "There are over 500 computer graphic shots in THE FRIGHTENERS, and that's more than were in CASPER. Grunge-enhancement has been added to the actors playing the ghosts, for example. Everything had to be done in-house because farming the digitals out to America would have been time-consuming and virtually impossible. I wanted to oversee everything and increasing our own work stations was the only way I could control that."

continued on page 61

Jackson cast the film with faces familiar to genre fans: Dee Wallace Stone (below) and Jeffrey Combs (inset).

JOE'S

An all singing, all

By Sean Strebin

What has 300,000 legs, and sings in high-pitched Brooklynese twenty-four hours a day? The 50,000 six-legged scene stealers that inhabit JOE'S APARTMENT. The musical-comedy was produced by Diana Phillips and Bonni Lee. The cast includes Jerry O'Connell (STAND BY ME), Megan Ward (TRANCERS II, Jim Turner (THE LOST BOYS), Robert Vaughn (THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E.), Don Ho, and Billy West and Reginald Hudlin as the voices of lead cockroaches Ralph and Rodney, respectively. Blue Sky handled the animation effects for the Geffen production which will be distributed by Warner Bros. in July.

Writer-director John Payson makes his full-length feature debut with JOE'S APARTMENT, which shot entirely on location in the East Village. Payson previously produced Henry Selick's award-winning short, SLOW BOB IN THE LOWER DIMENSION and directed music videos and station promos for MTV, where he served as supervising producer for the animated anthology series LIQUID TELEVISION. There, he created the animated short

Above Left: The roaches party-down in Joe's apartment, taking a bubble bath and dancing up a storm, in CGI effects sequences. Lower Left: Like Gulliver, Joe (Jerry O'Connell) gets tripped-up (below) by his Lilliputian opponents.

APARTMENT

dancing romantic musical cockroach comedy!

subject, JOE'S APARTMENT, which served as the premise of the feature film.

Payson's "organic portrait" is a musical about Joe (O'Connell), who moves into a rundown tenement and discovers that the original tenants are still there. He can hear them—singing. When he finally meets his roommates, they are 50,000 singing and dancing cockroaches that have been responsible for eating his food. However, they become his best friends and prove how much they support him when they keep him from being evicted by his landlord, Mr. Bianca (Ho). The plot thickens when Bianca sends his nephews to eliminate his pesky tenant so that he can sell the land to the city for a new prison. The story takes another twist when Lily, the activist-daughter of a senator (Vaughn), wants to plant a garden on the site instead. Joe learns, with the help of his 50,000 supporters, that he can turn the East Village around.

The roaches befriend Joe, but their efforts on his behalf remain a nuisance, as when they interrupt a romantic interlude between him and Lily (Megan Ward).

According to co-star Ward, who plays Lily, O'Connell went all-out to make his character's interaction with his hexapod costars work on screen. "Jerry did more than the director could have imagined," recalled Ward. "He put them on his face. He put them in his mouth. He put them on his clothes. Everyday, he had to do something that was more and more daring. He had to top himself."

From O'Connell's point of view, however, the challenge of delivering a solid performance was less a matter of interacting with the live roaches than with imagining the roaches that weren't there. "I'm from New York, so I was raised by cockroaches," he joked. "But working with the CGI roaches was a challenge, because you have nothing to act against. The roaches meddle in his life, and he doesn't want them in his life. They try to help Joe get a career, a girlfriend, and they're trying to make his life easier, but they are just making his life hell. It's like moving into a frat house in New York. It's not really Joe's apartment; it's the roaches' apartment."

Creating those roaches in their anthropomorphic form was the major task facing the makers of JOE'S APARTMENT. Animating the 50,000 singing, six-legged stars involved various special-effects techniques, according to Payson. Although not an animator himself, he knows how painstaking and expensive the process can be. "Our basic philosophy was, 'by any means necessary.' We used live roaches, puppets, stop-motion models, and computer-generated imaging for the really complicated scenes. I would come up with an idea; then we would figure out the best way to tackle it: what is the easiest and most efficient way to handle the dictates of the shot? The nature of the shot dictated what technique we would use. We're shooting the final sequence, which is a big musical number. It's the biggest shot of the roaches, where they spell out a word. This is one of the CGI shots in the film. We virtually used every technique developed for film on JOE'S APARTMENT."

Although one may think that the musical aspect was carried over from his MTV days, Payson says he actually decided it was the natural thing to do. "When you're going to do anthropomorphic humor, and you're going to have the roaches talk, why not have them sing?" he asked rhetorically. "The musical aspect seemed like the natural thing. People seemed to respond to it. We've been shooting the animation over a period of a year and a half. We're doing things that have never been done before. Like, how do you make cockroaches ride on the back of a cat like it's a bucking bronco? I'm fascinated with animation and think it's the best stuff. One thing that's really cool about animation is what's inside someone's head is projected there onto the screen. It's a direct-line to the creative unconscious."

So, what's JOE'S APARTMENT about, from the director's perspective? "JOE'S APARTMENT is a bitter-sweet love story—with cockroaches," said Payson. "It's about one young man who comes into his own in New York City. He has to find himself, find a place to live, and find love. JOE'S APARTMENT is about the struggle we all go through to find these things. Joe manages to do that with the help of his little friends." □

Writer-director John Payser originated JOE'S APARTMENT as a short subject for MTV'S LIQUID TELEVISION, an anthology of unusual animation.

PHENOMENON

A "wish-fulfillment fantasy" about becoming the smartest man in the world.

By Scott Tracy Griffin

"What if I were the smartest person in the world?" This universal question provides the premise for PHENOMENON, one of this summer's most thoughtful movies. Described by director John Turteltaub as a "wish-fulfillment fantasy," the character-driven film follows small-town auto mechanic and "ordinary guy," George Malley, played by John Travolta. George is struck by a blinding light of unknown origin, and soon begins to realize his untapped mental potential, evoking a variety of reactions from his friends and the townspeople who have known him all his life.

John Turteltaub directs John Travolta as George, a mechanic inexplicably transformed into a genius, along with Robert Duvall as the town physician.

In a culture that celebrates stupidity with characters like Al Bundy and Beavis & Butthead, where people of extraordinary intelligence are often stereotyped as socially inept, cold, aloof, and sometimes downright dangerous, PHENOMENON reflects a positive view of knowledge. Travolta and Turteltaub found this approach appealing.

"The movie's theme says that being intelligent is a good thing," commented Turteltaub, "and that through intelligence can come compassion and understanding and spirituality. So many films are trying to convince us that it's only the stupid people who are able to love, and only morons can see the beauty and truth in things."

Scripter Gerald DiPego agreed that the genius cannot live by equation alone. "When George becomes intelligent, he learns how important it is to blend, that the heart and the mind are one thing, and that genius can take us not just into the formulas of advanced physics, but into the human heart and spirit. The result is that spirituality, however you define it, is just as important as any kind of factual learning," said DiPego. The idea that enhanced knowledge, and the power it entails, would corrupt an individual has been explored many times in the science-fiction and horror realm. DiPego believes, however, that with such an increased knowledge would come increased empathy for others. "I think that there has been a division for a couple of hundred years between what we simplify as the heart and mind," said the screenwriter. "We think of people who are very brilliant as cold, having lost touch with their heart and emotions, and I don't think this is necessarily true."

DiPego contemplated the premise for nearly five years before committing it to paper. "I wanted to depict real genius, so I was a little apprehensive about pulling it off until I got a handle on it," he commented. "If someone suddenly gained a genius I.Q., it wouldn't mean that they'd have a lot of knowledge stuffed into their brain, but that they would have an increased capacity for learning, an understanding that would be immense."

The writer also theorizes that ordinary individuals with a suddenly enhanced learning capacity would follow their interests; in George's case, this means auto mechanics and gardening. DiPego read articles and consulted with experts in the field to give George's subsequent experimentation an authentic touch. Plants and cars aren't George's only interests, however. Giving credence to the popular (if erroneous) notion that we use only ten percent of our brains, George graduates from feats like becoming a chess whiz and learning to speak Portuguese in a few days, to exploring the paranormal realm of telekinesis.

Turteltaub compares the film's fantastic elements to science fiction in its purest form. Listing Harlan Ellison and Ray Bradbury among his favorite genre authors, he said, "All the great science fiction I've read has been material that takes elements of science and uses it to illustrate irony and satire, and illuminate, in a profound way, thematic and moral issues. The best science fiction series to me was the original STAR TREK, because they were little morality plays that had a science fiction basis to take you in a certain direction. The bottom line, however, was that they told human stories about the human condition. This is , likewise, what PHENOMENON is about."

George finds himself studied by those searching for the nature of the bright light that transformed him.

Turteltaub, who modestly characterized his directing method as "getting out of Travolta's way," believes that the human element is the film's strongest attraction; in fact, it secured his immediate commitment to the project.

"The characters are so real and interesting, so funny and rich, that I instantly knew these were people that I could stand to sit and watch for two hours," he recalled. "The film asks the viewer to think, to feel, and lets them laugh while doing it. I hope people will take away with them all the thematic ideas of the film, as well as be extremely impressed by some really incredible performances."

The strong supporting cast includes Kyra Sedgewick as George's romantic interest, Lace, a single mother determined not to love again; Robert Duvall as Doc, the town physician and George's father figure; and Forrest Whitaker as George's best friend, Nate Pope, a simple but good-hearted farmer perplexed by George's metamorphosis.

As scientists and laymen from around the world begin seeking George's counsel, his friends must grapple with his newfound abilities, and the resulting change in their respective relationships.

Uncharacteristic of the Hollywood movie-making culture, this project coalesced rapidly, a testament to the strength of the script. DiPego submitted the script to a close friend, producer Barbara Boyle, who sent it to the studios on a Friday; on the following Monday, Touchstone Pictures called to option the work. Travolta committed within twenty-four hours of reading the script. Turteltaub, fresh off the success of his last two hits, COOL RUNNINGS and WHILE YOU WERE SLEEPING, also joined without hesitation.

"The movie says that being intelligent is a good thing, that with it comes compassion and understanding and spirituality."

—Director John Turteltaub—

The producers soon had location scouts searching for a locale that would provide a small town atmosphere without a regional flavor like the South or New England. The filmmakers settled on Northern California's Sonoma County as the setting, an area DiPego credits as one of the inspirations for the screenplay. Just as the area's rustic beauty serves to inspire DiPego during trips to his vacation home there, George comes to a deeper understanding of nature, the universe, and man's place in it as a result of his mental growth.

And the source of George's newfound comprehension? DiPego and Turteltaub remained mum on that. "I think that immediately, the audience's minds will delve into all kinds of possibilities, including those we think of as the realm of science fiction. That's as much as I can say about it at this time," DiPego said cryptically.

When asked what makes PHENOMENON stand out in the intensely competitive summer film market, DiPego concluded, "PHENOMENON has a thoughtfulness, some heaviness and drama, and a good, positive spirit. It explores the possibilities within all of us. We can relate to this film, enter it, and carry something away with us." □

Below: Kyra Sedgewick plays Travolta's romantic interest, a single mother determined not to love again. Right: Forrest Whitaker plays Nate Pope one of George's many friends perplexed by his metamorphosis from an ordinary man into a genius.

Conceptual art by production designer Patrick Tatopolous, detail of the invaders, seated inside the alien docking bay (above), and Tom Lait's rendering of the world inside the massive extraterrestrial mothership.

INDE

Patrick Tatopoulos on

By Chuck Wagner

In INDEPENDENCE DAY, which opened July 3, a moment of shock is achieved when the small alien erupts from the body of a large invader. It turns out that the slight inner alien is the "true" alien and wears the outer alien as a living bio-suit.

It's a fascinating idea, conceived by production designer Patrick Tatopoulos and director Roland Emmerich. "In the script there was no definition or design or concept about the creature," said the designer.

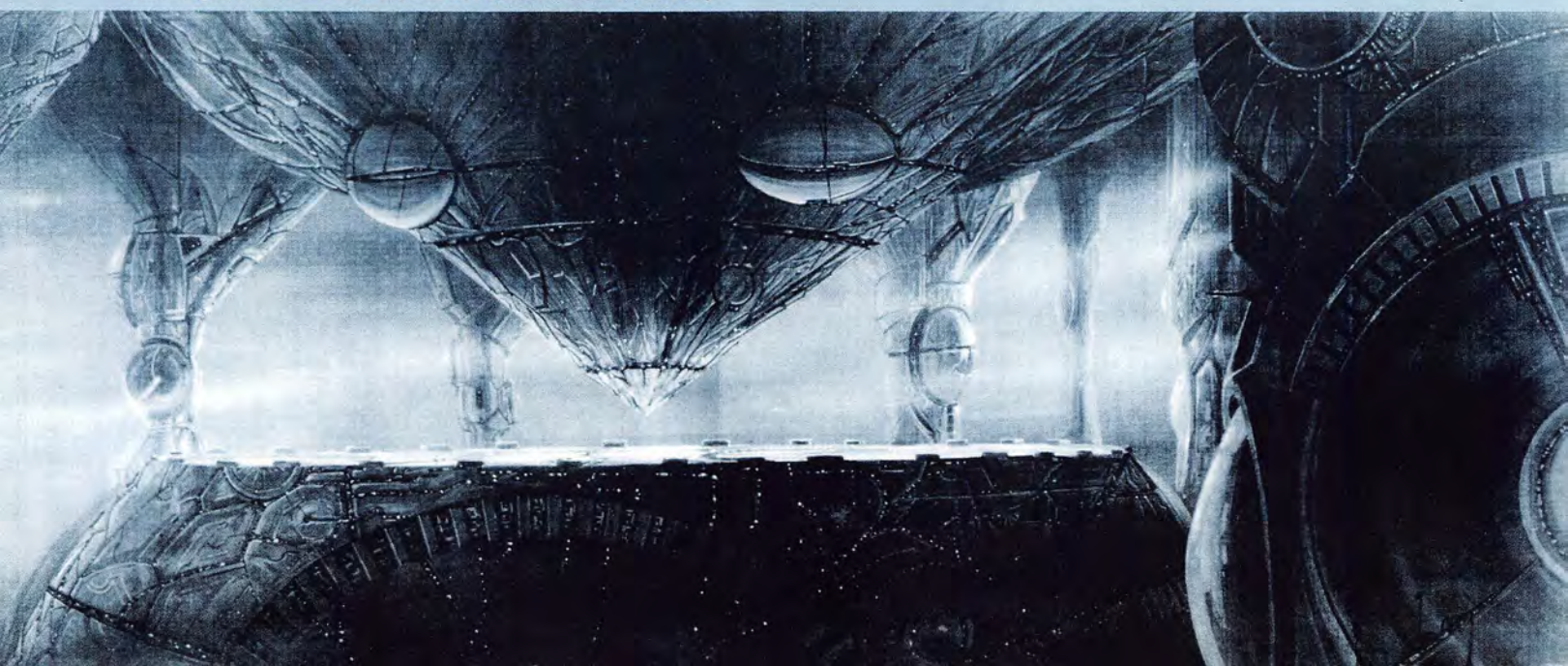
"There were two options I started with: a creature of fantasy and something closer to the actual popular imagery of an alien. I decided to do two different concepts.

"I drew each one of them, showed them to Roland Emmerich and he said, 'Well, I like both of them. We're going to use both of them.' And that's how we came up with the idea of nesting one creature inside the other."

The look of alien ships was influenced by the creature concepts. "We did tons of designs for the saucer," said Tatopoulos. "Some were really radically different from what you're going to be seeing in the movie. We started to come up with traditional-looking saucers, went to a fantasy-oriented, elaborate saucer—very strange with pieces coming out everywhere. The manta ray look was already happening on the alien head. If you look carefully at the top of the head of the small alien, it's almost an exact replica of the look of the attacker craft [alien attacker saucer] from the top as well. This flow of design came almost on its own. And we wanted to do something more organic."

The alien craft are of three types: the small attacker craft, which are like the fighters of an aircraft carrier; the destroyer craft, which are huge saucers covering the sky over vast cities; and the planet-sized mother ship, which is a travelling alien world unto itself.

"On top of the attacker design, we started to do the big destroyers," said Tatopoulos. "At that point we went more traditional. We wanted to use what



PENDENCE DAY

the art of science fiction production design.

people had seen before in some way, a dish-looking thing, except this is a gigantic dish. The scale makes it different from anything you've seen before. The concept was, people are in their house, and they come out one day and suddenly the sky turns mechanical everywhere, from horizon to horizon."

Above all, the overweening blackness of the ships helps to inspire awe—and dread. The arrival of the destroyers—and the vast shadows they cast—are a potent image from the movie. "I hope it will hit the people watching that way," said Tatopoulos. "I found it very convincing."

And last comes the planet-sized mother ship, a craft only hinted at in the advance film trailer. "The mothership is basically a planet of its own," said Tatopoulos. "It's a gigantic craft—about 500 miles long. It's very organic, like a cocoon or half of an egg shell.

"Inside this mothership, we created cities," continued Tatopoulos. "Gigantic cities in this empty space." The scale is reminiscent of the alien vastness depicted in FORBIDDEN PLANET. "It's even bigger than that," said Tatopoulos, when reminded of the classic film. "When you hit the inside of the mothership, you're suddenly in a new space. There's no reference. It's like a cloudy world, like mist. Flying in there, they slowly start seeing those towers coming toward them. Every tower is a gigantic city-thing, with alien work, etc., going on.

"Meanwhile, you see all the attackers and gigantic craft flying out, and stuff like that. So it becomes a world in itself. It's definitely a movie inside the movie at the end. The first part of the movie happens on the Earth, with the aliens attacking us. But by the last part of the movie, you end up being in their world."

Tatopoulos, who has designed STARGATE and worked on the look of SUPER MARIO BROS., clearly has a gift in visualizing the fantastic. "I'm not crazy about looking for references and trying to duplicate an apartment in Beverly Hills," he said.

Next up for Tatopoulos, designing GODZILLA for Emmerich and Devlin as Tri-Star's big-budget monster movie for summer 1997. □

Above: The full-size, eight-foot-tall puppet of the alien environmental suit, with alien inside, ready for filming. Right, 1: Tatopoulos paints an alien stunt-suit for an action sequence. 2: Tatopoulos and creature-effects crew, on the set, ready a take with the alien suit. 3: Tatopoulos checks the movement of the 1/4 scale rod puppet of the suited alien invader.

The CROW city of angels

The bird of ill-omen casts its shadow on a new avenger in this futuristic follow-up.

The film's titular "City of Angels" is a sort of futuristic, alternate version of Los Angeles, achieved through selective use of location shooting, set dressing, and yellow sodium lighting.

Following up a film with the tragic history of THE CROW seems, at first glance, to be an exercise in classic Hollywood bad taste. The young and likeable star, Brandon Lee, was the cornerstone to a fate that just seems to scream irony: the son of the late Bruce Lee (who himself had died as his star was about to rise) was killed in a freak accident on the set of what could have been his own breakthrough picture—the story of a man who comes back from the dead for love and revenge.

Although a sequel to such an experience smacks of tacky commercialism, the makers of THE CROW: CITY OF ANGELS feel they've taken great pains to avoid just such a view of their effort. The Edward R. Pressman production, due from Dimension Films on August 2nd, stars Vincent Perez, previously

by Frederick C. Szebin & Steve Biodrowski

Ashe (Vincent Perez), the new incarnation of the Crow, falls in love with Sarah, now played by Mia Kirshner. Inset left: Ashe and his son (Eric Acosta) are tied by Spider Monkey (Vincent Castellanos) before being drowned. Inset right: resurrected, Ashe exacts payback from Spider Monkey.

PRODUCTION DESIGNER

Alex McDowell on creating 'Crow City.'

McDowell carefully selected actual L.A. locations to create the otherworldly look of the exteriors, as in this confrontation between Ashe and some thugs.

It's a very different project, really; for me, it was almost completely new," said production designer Alex McDowell of being one of the few CROW alumni to return for CITY OF ANGELS. "One of the attractions was that it was a chance to capitalize on having established a new audience—to go beyond what the first one did. In that, we still had police stations, apartments and bathrooms. This film doesn't really at all; it goes into a true HIGH PLAINS DRIFTER area—it has that kind of stark simplicity.

"Tim Pope had a different approach than Alex Proyas. He was more interested in developing the interior emotional landscape of the characters—both bad and good, not just the Crow character. So I was able to develop much more symbolic landscapes, in response to that." Working in these landscapes was "more difficult, technically, but in almost every other way it's simpler, if only because your creative juices are forced to flow in that kind of situation. To invent a landscape from scratch is always more stimulating to me, so it was a very enjoyable process."

McDowell had to reconcile this invented landscape with the realism of filming on location. "It's kind of a nice dilemma," he said. "It's a challenge to take L.A., the most filmed city in the world, and find a new city in there—which I think we've done. I've never seen an L.A. that looks like this one. It's called the City of Angels, so it was important that there be no direct reference to L.A., that we create a parallel world, like we did the first time—although we were forced into that, because there wasn't one frame shot on location in Detroit. Here we were shooting in the real L.A. to create a parallel world."

How was this achieved? "It's simple: you just have to establish some ground rules. I think personally that it's to do with the focus of your vision: you have to be rigid in what you allow into the frame; it's more what you remove than what you put in. A certain Gothic look was developed for the film, and I had a clear idea of what was and wasn't Crow city as we went around scouting locations. It was mostly downtown, this '20s through '40s architecture—you could look at any building and say 'yes' or 'no.' And basically you don't even have to change what you find; you just have to say what the limits of the frame are.

"What I then did—and I think this is essential in any film—was to create a map of the world that places all of these little pockets of the right look in the correct context to each other. Then you sort out an artificial geography, so that—if you adhere to it rigidly—when you go from left to right in this building, you know you're going to arrive at that building."

McDowell's job also involved determining which scenes would be sets, versus locations or miniatures. "Necessity drives that," he said. "You start by knowing you're working with a limited budget, so you see what you can find on location. How many pages are you doing in each setting? After so many pages, it's no longer worth doing it on location, even if you find one, because you spend so much time in that space that you need to move walls and light it in a certain way. So it was always clear that Sarah's loft and the interior of Judah's tower were going to be key sets. [Judah's] was interesting because it had no exterior views; it had to symbolically be like a cage, because he's agoraphobic. Sarah's place had to convey the whole idea of L.A. in an interior space—totally ruined, earthquake-damaged. Something we thought of early on was the earthquakes have created homes for the homeless—all the buildings that have been condemned have opened up space for the homeless to live. We imagined Sarah's in that way, that it was a condemned space she moved into."

Summing up the look he tried to achieve, McDowell said, "It's kind of post-apocalyptic. It's in the nature of THE CROW as a kind of world right at the edge of civilization; we're in the dregs of the last remnants of society. Tim has this quote about boiling the L.A. River down—that's the essence of the film. My job is to make an iconography of the city and make each little part represent the whole." **Steve Biodrowski**

McDowell's pre-production painting for Judah's lair, including voyeuristic cameras recording a hot wax S&M interlude.

seen in such imported efforts as QUEEN MARGOT and CYRANO DE BERGERAC. Also in the cast are Mia Kirshner (EXOTICA), Richard Brooks (TO SLEEP WITH ANGER), and punk rock legend Iggy Pop. Production designer Alex McDowell and producer Jeff Most were among the few returning veterans from the first film, while the director's reins were turned to first-time feature helmer Tim Pope, with David Goyer (PUPPETMASTERS) supplying the script.

"I turned down the job a couple times," said Goyer, "because the idea of making a sequel with Brandon Lee having died during the first film was too weird. But I thought about it for a while and decided that what would have been more disturbing was to make a sequel *with* Brandon Lee—or rather, his character, played by another actor. Eric Draven's story was finished."

British-born Tim Pope was tapped to direct this current excursion into THE CROW's dark world after having directed music videos for such artists as David Bowie, Queen, Iggy Pop, and The Cure—a fact he kept hidden from Hollywood ("because people have preconceptions of video directors"), preferring to present himself on the basis of his short film, PHONE, with Amanda Plummer, Bill Pullman and Linda Blair, which toured the festival circuit a few years ago. Like Goyer, Pope wasn't sure THE CROW 2 was a project he wanted. "I was slightly resistant," Pope admitted. "I thought, 'God, here's a bit of a challenge—this is going to be a tricky film to follow.'" However, his doubts were overcome after a meeting with executive producer Edward R. Pressman.

"We talked about a lot of the problems of following the first movie," Pope continued. "He, more than anyone, wants to be sacred to the memory of Brandon Lee. I thought that there was another story to be told about what it would really be like if you were this guy. It struck me that Brandon Lee's character got out of bed, did what he had to do, and went to sleep again. In this movie, we've got a slightly more reluctant hero."

DARK DAMSEL IN DISTRESS

"She's like a modern-day Ophelia," said Kirshner of Sarah. "She's fallen in love with Death, and she has an inner conflict trying to suppress the darkness inside of her."

Sarah (Kirshner), held captive by the villain Judah (Richard Brooks), is the only returning character from the original, now a morbid, melancholy adult.

What Pressman allowed Pope and Goyer to do was focus on the idea that "the Crow" was a mantle thrust onto individuals throughout time; that is, Eric Draven wasn't the first and certainly wouldn't be the last. "We've got a very different set of circumstances," said producer Jeff Most of the sequel. "In the first movie, we were able to establish the back story of what the Crow is and how it allows individuals to return to right wrongs that were committed. We've been able to take that and move on, so we don't have to pay so much attention to that, necessarily."

Goyer faced the difficulty of creating a new story from just a basic premise, without bringing back the character Eric Draven. "I don't think Brandon Lee played The Crow," said Goyer of his approach. "The Crow was the entity or force which brings people back. I told the producers that—if you accept that the Crow had always been bringing people back and that Eric Draven was only one of them—then I think you could tell a story. Part of the story would have to do with setting up the fact that this was part of a lineage. That interested me. The producers latched onto the idea that there had been Crows before and would be Crows again."

Crow creator James O'Barr, whose graphic novel served as the basis for the first film, was consulted, and he offered, if somewhat reluctantly (*see sidebar*), input that was incorporated into the script. Director Pope also turned an eye on O'Barr's original work. "What interested me about the comic, which I'd never seen," said Pope, "was that kind of purity at the heart of it: James O'Barr had created it after experiencing a great loss in his own life. In a sense, there was a catharsis in the piece. What I did with our approach to the movie was embrace the purity of the original idea."

"It was a real challenge to make this story different but the same," added Goyer. "The first thing I wanted was a female Crow. The second thing I wanted—and I lost this battle, too—was to do a gaslight CROW, set in Victorian England or turn-of-the-century New York. I thought that really would have shaken people up in terms of telling a different story. At times, writing the script was very frustrating. My instinct was always to make it as different as possible. I felt that the wrong that needed to be righted and the Crow being the link were the only rules they should feel obligated to follow. You wouldn't want it to become like a vampire movie, with its set traditions."

The idea of a female undead avenger, which originated with O'Barr, was overruled by the producers for fear of how it would affect box office returns. "It shouldn't have been a concern," stated Goyer, "since THE CROW seems to have an inordinately high female audience for an action picture. When I was writing, I would go online and talk to the fans. I would say the ratio is about 60% women. That shocked a lot of people. I asked, 'Why did you like the movie?' The men said they liked the action, and the women liked it because it was romantic. They couldn't think of anything more romantic than someone coming back from the dead for the person they loved."

Ultimately, Goyer crafted a script centering on Ashe, a single parent working as a mechanic, trying to raise his eight year old son, Danny. The mystical bird brings Ashe's spirit back to strike vengeance after

Ashe shares a quiet moment with his son before tragedy befalls them in the form of Judah's henchmen.

Although the filmmakers promise more depth, action has not been omitted, as when Ashe survives gunfire during a melee at the Second Coming Club.

he and Danny are drowned by the minions of the villainous Judah. Ashe is guided in his new role by Sarah, the young girl from the first film, now grown up and living in the eponymous City of Angels (a futuristic version of Los Angeles, although never specifically identified as such). She has kept the wedding ring of her lost friends, which was given to her by the bird at the end of THE CROW, and keeps it on a chain around her neck. Obsessed with Death, she has begun to have recurring nightmares of someone new being killed and coming back as a Crow. She discovers Ashe, gives him the appropriate look, and tries to help him understand his new role as undead avenger, while the two of them break a critical law of the netherworld by falling in love.

"We've been able to devise a script and a character that carry a great emotional depth," boasted Most. "This character has his own set of difficulties to overcome and does not embrace [being the Crow]. He was a father with a tremendous attachment to his little boy. Unlike the first film, he falls in love in this one. It's a forbidden love: one person of the flesh and one not of this world. It's a chasm that really cannot be crossed, but Sarah is drawn to Ashe, almost as if these are two souls that are intrinsically linked and were meant to be together, had his early demise not come about."

Sybill (Tracey Ellis) is Judah's blind oracle, who warns him of the nature of the Crow's powers.

Besides Sarah and the wedding ring that she wears on her neck, the only other element of continuity is Eric's white cat, Gabriel, which she adopted at the end of the previous film. "It's funny," said Goyer. "I told the producers that the cat should still be there, and I read in an interview with James O'Barr that he thought the only two consistent things in the CROW: DEADTIME STORIES he's doing now should be the Crow itself and the white cat. This was completely independent of each other."

Ironically, while writing CITY OF ANGELS, Goyer was simultaneously working on DARK CITY with Alex Proyas, who directed the first CROW. "He didn't like that the sequel was being made," said Goyer. "He didn't begrudge Pressman hiring me to do it, but he never wanted to know too much about what was going on. He still is, and probably always will be, upset about what happened."

BREAK ON THROUGH

"I felt THE CROW had a connection between Hamlet and Jim Morrison," said Perez. "Not that I'm playing Morrison, but the flavor of the two worlds helped me to prepare."

According to Pope, the next big hurdle, after a script was in place, was casting. "How could you ever follow Brandon Lee?" he asked. "I probably met around 200 guys, and a lot of them were like Son of Brandon or Twin Brother of Brandon. I thought this was absolutely the wrong approach. Then Vincent Perez popped up. He seemed to have a combination of darkness and light to him. He plays the character very differently than Brandon did. It's less of using physical prowess as a fighter, although we have that stuff, of course. There is a whole internal journey for the character, a kind of descent into Hell, as he chases after these people."

Vincent Perez signed on after being impressed by the production team's commitment to the project. "When I first met Tim," said the actor, "I really liked him. He was really centered and connected to himself. I felt something strong coming from him; also, I felt that he really wanted to work with me, which is very appealing. Ed Pressman was also a part of it. I felt a trust between the three of us, like a good chemistry. The story sort of called me, in a way. Everybody is fascinated by the call of Death. Like The Doors: why did this cult spring up around them? Because they were always singing about death and keeping the faith. And Hamlet is such a famous story because it's about death—a father coming back and asking his son to avenge him. I really felt that THE CROW had a connection between Hamlet and Jim Morrison. I'm not saying that I'm playing Jim Morrison; it's not the same. But the flavor of the two worlds helped me to prepare for the part."

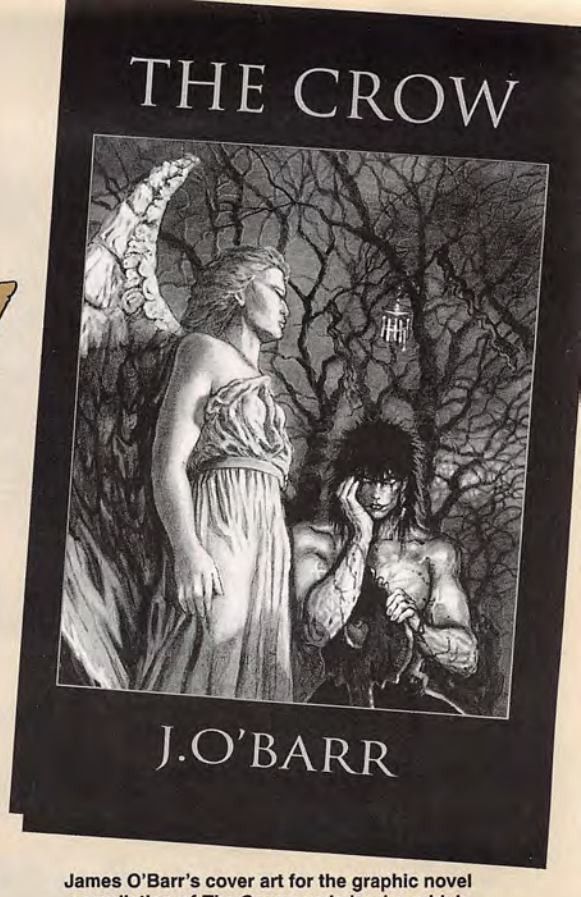
The key to the effectiveness of a supernatural hero is in creating a worthy adversary who can tax the hero's strengths, while playing on his weaknesses. This chore led to many heated arguments between the writer and his producers. A draft was written bringing back the first film's villain, Top Dollar. This was jettisoned when Goyer convinced his bosses that the idea "stunk of sequelitis."

Said Goyer, "I argued that what should happen is that you should have a villain do what Mika and Top Dollar implied in the first movie: Mika, Top Dollar's woman, says that the Crow

Kali (MIGHTY MORPHIN' POWER RANGERS' Thuy Trang), and Curve (punk rock legend Iggy Pop) threaten Noah (Ian Dury) at the Grey Gargoyle.

JAMES O'BARR

The comic book creator muses on his work's unanticipated afterlife.



James O'Barr's cover art for the graphic novel compilation of *The Crow* comic books, which inspired the 1994 film of the same name.

By Russell Lissau

How are you supposed to keep a movie and comic book icon alive when the actor most identified with the character is dead?

It's a question that has plagued James O'Barr, the artist and writer who created *The Crow* in comic book form more than a decade ago and who helped bring the avenging hero to the screen in 1994. Despite the tragic death of actor Brandon Lee during filming, a sequel is about to hit movie theaters, and two completely new *Crow* comic books were released this year, with another on the way.

This is the man, after all, who once promised that there would never, ever, be another *Crow* comic book, let alone another movie, and who wanted THE CROW to stand as a memorial to the fallen actor.

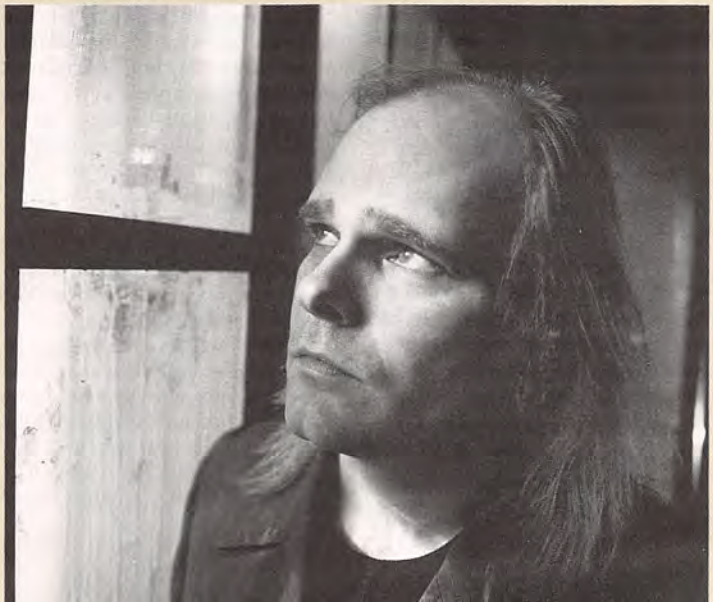
Lee's death aside, THE CROW had a very contained plot: man and fiancee are brutally killed; man comes back from the dead to avenge their murders; man returns to grave when killers are taken care of. Why would anyone want to mess with such a perfect story? The answer is simple: THE CROW made a fortune. And in Hollywood, if a movie does big bucks, a sequel is sure to follow with or without the help of the man who created the thing in the first place.

"I did everything I could to stop it," O'Barr, 36, said recently from his Detroit-area home. "They made $100 million on the first film. How much more money did they need to make?" But according to O'Barr, the filmmakers threatened to take him to court until long after the picture was completed, making his arguments moot. So instead of fighting, O'Barr realized the inevitable and tried to have as much input on the project as he could. Most importantly, he didn't want THE CROW: CITY OF ANGELS to detract from the first film or from Brandon Lee's breathtaking performance as Eric, the man who would become the Crow.

"I was really against doing any kind of sequel that would gouge anything out of the first film," O'Barr said "In the beginning, I tried to do another storyline with someone else (as the Crow), but I couldn't. Everything I wrote, I wrote for Brandon."

As a result, David Goyer handled the scriptwriting duties. The plot puts an interesting twist on the Crow mythology by saying that Eric was not the only Crow but one of a series of victims resurrected throughout history to exact their revenge against those who wronged them. An occasional visitor to the Los Angeles back lot where the film was made, O'Barr spoke with the filmmakers and actors and kicked around ideas when possible. O'Barr said he found his first trip to the set a little unnerving, the locations reminding him of the time he spent with Lee. "The first couple of days I was on the set I was having a lot of the emotion and mood that I had on the first one, like smoking cigarettes and drinking bad coffee while you're waiting for them to set up the next scene," he said. "There was a lot of emotional washover."

O'Barr originally wanted to avoid a sequel but became involved when he realized it was inevitable: "How much more money did they need to make?"



And for O'Barr, the first Crow projects were *filled* with emotion. O'Barr, who had painted covers for several comic books and magazines as a teenager, began writing *The Crow* in 1981, after his fiancee was killed by a drunken driver. At the time he started the project, O'Barr was in the Marine Corps illustrating combat man-

FX RESURRECTION

How Dream Quest helped complete the original film, without the star.

There have been several tragic examples of motion pictures that had to be completed after the unfortunate early demise of their stars. One of the most famous of these was BRAINSTORM, which director Douglas Trumbull managed to complete after the death of Natalie Wood, despite a studio that simply wanted to pull the plug on it and collect the insurance money. In the case of THE CROW, original distributor Paramount bailed out of a negative pick-up deal after the on-set death of Brandon Lee, but Ed Pressman productions managed to complete the film and find a new distributor, resulting in a sleeper success in 1994. How did they do it?

Dream Quest was supplying effects for the film when the fatal accident occurred. "Production ground to a halt, and we were in a bit of a quandary," recalled Tim Landry, a visual effects supervisor at Dream Quest. "But I told the guys, 'I bet we're going to get a phone call.' Sure enough, we got a call, asking, 'Can you guys take an actor's face and put it on somebody else's body?'"

So Landry and his then fledgling digital division went to work. "They had precious little footage of Brandon Lee without the Crow makeup on," said Landry. "So they had to go through every trim [of film] that they could find, just to get frames of him that they had shot without that makeup and construct scenes to fill-in the story points that hadn't been made."

Then, a la PLAN NINE FROM OUTER SPACE, scenes were shot with a double, in darkness, or with the character's head turned away from the camera. "They decided to go for some key scenes where you would establish for sure that it is Brandon Lee," noted Landry. "For those few scenes and few frames, we did various tricks of taking him out of the background that he was in when they shot that footage, putting him in new backgrounds, and occasionally, for a few frames, putting his face on a body double." To add to this, some of the original footage of Lee was shot with a hand held camera, so first the technicians had to stead the shot through the use of computers, before they could take Lee's image out of it.

After Brandon Lee's accidental death during filming of THE CROW, the film had to be completed with whatever footage was available. For example, Dream Quest Images composited this scene of his character entering a hallway (left) by using an image of the actor taken from an alley scene (below).

As innovative as this sounds, Landry admits that he was just doing what he had to do. "You can call it groundbreaking, but it was really just brute force stuff. It was high profile, but it was really a lot of hand work that was just made a whole lot easier, and some of it was only made possible through the use of a computer."

So, is the much talked-about fear of computers taking over for actors actually becoming a reality? "No!" declared Landry. "I want to say emphatically: Actors will never be replaced by computer actors, at least not computer actors portraying believable human beings. I don't believe that's even possible." Landry adds that we may see computer characters (such as the ghost in CASPER and the toys in TOY STORY), but there are too many nuances and subtleties in an actor's performance that just can't be captured in a computer.

Landry and his team may not be able to replace actors, and may not have received an Oscar nomination for their work on THE CROW. But fans of the film know that, if it weren't for them, THE CROW may never have flown. **Mike Lyons**

uals, and he thought *The Crow* would be a productive way to overcome his pain. But the heart-wrenching story only made it worse. "It was too draining and too painful to work on, so I put it on a shelf," O'Barr said. "It was like opening old wounds every time I tried to work on it."

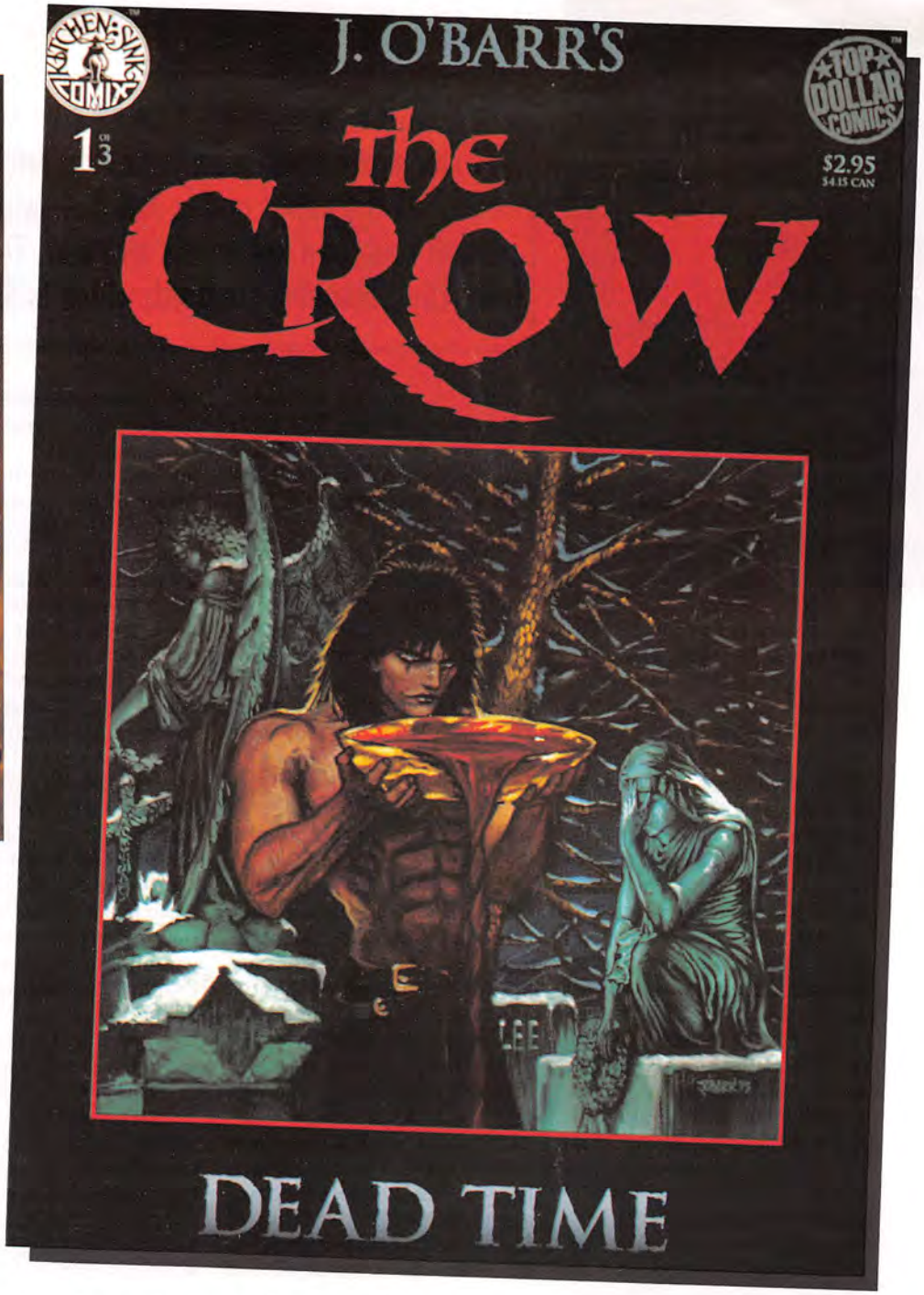
Still, the comic attracted the attention of the people at Caliber Press, and the first four issues were published in 1989. In early 1992, after Caliber put the book on hiatus due to financial problems, Tundra Publishing reprinted the stories as the first two books of a three-volume series. The third and final chapter appeared later that year, and a graphic novel by Kitchen Sink Press that compiled all the stories and included some new material appeared in 1993.

Later this year, Kitchen Sink will release an unabridged Crow graphic novel that includes O'Barr's so-called lost pages, panels of artwork that were drawn but not published at the time due to space constraints.

"It was really [Kitchen Sink publisher] Denis Kitchen's idea," O'Barr said. "I had written about 16 pages [that were not printed], and it was his suggestion to collect them all and do a definitive 'Director's Edition.'"

Because the collector's edition also will include pages that he has touched up or redrawn since they first appeared, the book is something of an artistic exercise for O'Barr, who at an early age was told by one of his comic book industry heroes that it's important for an artist to improve upon his past work.

"I could possibly redraw the whole book from different camera angles," he said. "Bernie Wrightson told me, when I was 13 years old and I met him at a comic book convention, not to get discouraged, because I thought I wasn't doing good work at the time. He said he took an old drawing and redrew it every year, just to see how his artwork had progressed. And I started doing that. The differ-



Above: The mantle of James O'Barr's Crow is passed onto Ashe (Vincent Perez) in THE CROW: CITY OF ANGELS. Likewise, for *The Crow: Deadtime*, O'Barr supplied a new story with a new protagonist. O'Barr's cover art depicts Eric Draven, the protagonist of the original graphic novel, pouring blood from a sacrificial bowl onto the grave of Brandon Lee.

ence is astounding. If you look at what I did when I was 13, you can't even tell the drawings were by the same artist."

Kitchen Sink released two new Crow books this year: *Dead Time* and *Flesh & Blood*. Like CITY OF ANGELS, the comics starred new characters who return from the dead to avenge their deaths. Both books were drawn and written by other people, leaving O'Barr with "story" credit. Kitchen Sink's comic book adaptation is due out in July.

For the first two books, O'Barr served as something of an editor, overseeing the projects and making sure the stories didn't stray too far from the mythology he had created without stepping on the original *Crow* series. "I wouldn't let anyone use the Eric or Shelly characters again—that was one of the rules," O'Barr explained. "I said, 'You can use the mythology, but the stories have to stand out on their own.' I didn't want any flashbacks to the first story or any resurrection. They've been really compliant with everything. There's no tension at all."

The project wasn't always so stress free, however. O'Barr painted the full-color covers for the books, including the chilling depiction of Eric, the first Crow, standing at Brandon Lee's grave and spilling blood out of a ceremonial bowl, which appears on the first *Dead Time* cover.

"At the time I painted it, I was angry that I was kind of being forced back into it," he said. "The whole merchandising aspect of it really turns me off. It's almost like, how much more money can you squeeze out of Brandon's bones? So in the painting, Eric is standing over Brandon's gravestone, pouring blood out of a gold urn."

O'Barr's feelings for his slain friend clearly remain strong despite the time that has passed since Lee's death. Lee, the son of the late martial arts legend Bruce Lee, was killed on THE CROW's North Carolina set in 1993 when he was shot with a gun that was supposed to be loaded with blanks. Ironically, the shooting occurred during the filming of the scene in which Eric is murdered.

Lee once told O'Barr that he thought THE CROW was going to be his breakthrough, a film that would finally get him from out of his father's shadow. O'Barr thought he was right.

"I think Brandon's performance was amazing," O'Barr said. "It was so far above anything he had ever done. It's funny to hear critics talk fondly about him when they bashed him the year before for RAPID FIRE."

It goes without saying that O'Barr feels CITY OF ANGELS star Vincent Perez has some big shoes to fill. "Even though Vincent Perez is well-schooled and classically trained," O'Barr explained, "Brandon brought something to the role, an innocence, that I don't think anyone will duplicate. Vincent may read a line better than Brandon, but there's more to acting than that."

But forget the Brandon-Vincent compar-

continued on page 62

THE BALANCE OF EVIL

"I saw a see-saw," said Pope, "at one end is Ashe; at the other end is Judah—who isn't just all bad, and Ashe isn't all good. Then you have the balancing element, which is Sarah."

is the link; it has power. The power can be taken, and that's what our villain, Judah, attempts to do: kill the Crow, assume its powers, and subvert it for evil means. We add this reversal where Judah becomes — well, the lame term for it is 'the Anti-Crow'."

Richard Brooks, the actor taking on that role, isn't quite willing to call Judah a villain. 'Antagonist' seems more apt when dealing with a character with more complexity than your average bad guy. CITY OF ANGELS has the seductive power of evil at its core; Judah is merely one man who gave into his dark side. "I've played a few villains," said Brooks , "but I never think of a character as a villain. I feel like they're misunderstood. I try to find the light, even in a darker character. I like to have the empathy of the audience in a way. At any moment, we all could cross over into the darkness. It's a choice every time you have to hit the brakes and stop yourself from crossing over. You could always kill someone who gets in your way or say, 'Excuse me.' These are conscious choices we make. I like to have a complex character who is always choosing, for very specific reasons, to cross the line because he's decided that this way is for him."

Judah suffered "a loss of innocence as a child," according to Brooks. "Because of that, his journey is to always reclaim some kind of purity. The character felt abandoned and betrayed when he was vulnerable and because of that almost lost his life. Since then, he knows how fragile life is. It's made him push, because his idea to get back to see God is to be as dark as he can by going to Hell, like Dante."

"The basic notion we came up with was of the villain as a mirror image of the Crow," added Pope."I always saw a see-saw: there's Ashe, who has had this mantle thrust upon him, and there's Judah—who is not just all bad, and Ashe isn't all good. Then you have the balancing element, which is Sarah."

In this schematic of the film's structure, Ashe and Judah stand at opposite ends of the balance, while Sarah is the fulcrum on which that balance rests. Her tortured existence, as portrayed in the first film, has left her a fallen angel of sorts, with wings actually tattooed on her back. Mia Kirshner, the Canadian actress who embodies the adult Sarah, calls the character "atypical for the genre. It's so rare in an action film that you have a character who is so poetic. She's really like a modern-day Ophelia. She has fallen in love with Death, and Death is her lover—that's the premise of the character. I think she has an inner conflict, trying to suppress the darkness and evil inside of her, and trying to allow the good inside of her to overcome the evil. At this point, she's no longer afraid of death; she doesn't care if she dies. She's not apathetic toward life; she's apathetic toward death.

"I think in terms of story and characterization," Kirshner added, "that this script is much stronger than the first: the characters are very well thought out, and the plot is very intricate. There are so many literary elements in the script that I love; I really liked that it drew from the *Divine Comedy* and the *Inferno* in particular. So many action movies pander to a lowest common denominator; there's grunting, yelling, and screaming, but no depth. I love action movies, but it's rare that you see one with real depth."

Ashe's Crow differs from Eric Draven's in a couple important ways. Eric wanted to complete his mission and go back to the grave. Ashe has the dilemma of falling in love with Sarah and wanting to stay. And whereas Eric put his foes to death with a dark bit of humor, Ashe agonizes over each killing, becoming like a mirror as he goes into their weaknesses and guides them to death. "It's like an act of love toward his victims every time he kills someone," Perez claimed. "He's reflecting them. We built beautiful relationships between the victims and Ashe. I would say that's the difference between the first and second CROW films.

"I can be the Joker, the Priest, the Clown, the Devil—I'm all of that," Perez continued. "Judah is my shadow, my pain. Also, Ashe suddenly realizes that there is a God somewhere and discovers that even God has turned His back on him. I think the part is really rich. I love that in my work, trying to find all the little transformations of a role. I was really trying to find Ashe's human side. The killing is not easy for him. The first death, in the excitement of his power and the pleasure of it, is like a trip. After that, he goes into fear and solitude. He's cursed by himself, by the fact that God turned His back on him, that even in a church he can't find peace."

Top Right: Ashe (Vincent Perez) is the avenger whose quest leads him out of the light and into the darkness. Top Left: Judah (Richard Brooks) is the antagonist whose inverted mixture of good and evil balances Ashe. Below: at the center is Sarah (Mia Kirshner), the fulcrum on which that balance rests.

THE CROW: CITY OF ANGELS shot eight and a half weeks of principal photography in downtown L.A. and on the Universal Studios lot. Although that may seem like an adequate amount of time, the ambitious scope of the project kept the director on his toes. "Our schedule was so damn tight—really

THE CROW

VISUAL EFFECTS

Bringing the City of Angels to life.

Above: Gene Warren Jr.'s Fantasy II effects crew sets up the miniature City of Angels. Right: a camera films a bird's-eye P.O.V. of the city.

Nobody wants to live in a crowded, polluted, claustrophobic city, let alone design one. This, however, was the responsibility that fell upon FANTASY II, the visual effects technicians behind THE CROW: CITY OF ANGELS, whose task was to create the eponymous city that serves as the film's setting. Roger Dorney, the effects supervior said that the opening shot, which establishes the teeming city, was among the toughest. "It was as intricate as we got," he said. "It was the most labor-intensive period of the shoot." The reason for this is that the filmmakers chose not to create the "City of Angels" through computer graphics but through the "old-fashioned," blood-and-sweat method of models and miniatures, all of which had to be painstakingly detailed.

Like INDEPENDENCE DAY, the new CROW film merges such tools of the past with recent cutting-edge technology of computer-generated imagery and digital effects. "You use the best tool for the job," said Dorney. "You don't just use one tool, and that's what I'm afraid that many people are doing now. Everybody's computer crazy, figuring that it's the only way to do anything. Not only isn't it the only way to do it, but many times, it's not the best way to do it. I think you use all the tools available."

Throughout filming, Dorney chose the right tool based on one important factor: "Eventually, it comes down to the quality of the image. It's not about budgets or time. What everyone is going to remember is what's up on the screen." Dorney notes that computers would never have been able to achieve the heightened sense of reality needed for certain shots of the city. "Miniatures always look better," he proclaimed, adding, "It really gives you some scale; the motion and the smoke environment is realistic that way."

Another veteran of the visual effects game, blue and gree screen technology, also plays a major role in bringing CITY OF ANGELS to life. With these technologies, an actor goes into a studio and delivers his performance in front of a blank blue or green screen, after which background footage is inserted in place of the screen, giving the illusion that the actor is actually standing in front of the background. This process can be somewhat taxing on an actor, because he essentially has to react to nothing. "Actors who have never done it before get spooked," laughed Dorney, adding, "We have the background shot on tape and you can play that on a monitor outside of frame, allowing the actor to establish eye-lines and get his cadence down. This way, he can actually watch the scene around him and react to that. So, after one or two rehearsal takes, you kind of get into the swing of it."

Dorney, a thirty-year veteran of the visual effects industry, whose projects include everything from STAR TREK: THE MOTION PICTURE to TV's QUANTUM LEAP, says that it's not only interesting in the industry now, in the midst of this effects renaissance, but also on movies like CITY OF ANGELS, in which he gets to work with "old F/X favorites" and handle the latest technology. Of Hollywood's newest toy, CGI, Dorney said, "At first, you're intimidated by it; then you find out that physics is physics, and the same stuff that worked on film works on computers. Soon, it isn't scary anymore, and as soon as it isn't scary, it's a lot of fun."

Mike Lyons

Below: Alex McDowell's' paintings established the intended look for "Crow City," to be realized under the supervision of fx supervisor Roger Dorney. Left: the miniature cityscape.

Ashe (Perez) embraces the dying Sarah (Kirshner), during the Day of the Dead festival. According to David Goyer, the set up is for Sarah to return as the Crow in Part 3.

scary," said Pope. "To shoot 48 days on something of this scale was difficult. Some nights I'd be in a car park, sitting in my trailer at 4:00 in the morning thinking, 'Christ, I want to go home!'" He laughed. "It was a hard schedule, and I wanted to keep the movie on it. My idea is always to embrace a situation like that and just go for it, which I did."

In order to keep the budget in line, the production company dressed parts of L.A. streets for the exteriors. Unfortunately, the city is an over-used location; so much of it has appeared in countless films over the years that its streets and alleys no longer hold surprises. But Pope was able to squeeze a little something extra from the locales and even impress his veteran film editor, Anthony Redman (who cut Abel Ferrara's THE BAD LIEUTENANT and BODY SNATCHERS). "I didn't want CITY OF ANGELS to look like BLADE RUNNER or any other movies shot in Los Angeles," said the director, "so we created a fresh look for it, and were very specific in our locations. My editor was saying that there are certain locations you've seen in a million movies before, and we used some of those, but he said to me, 'I've never seen them look quite like this.' So I feel we've done our job in terms of creating an authentic CROW-like world."

Abandoning her innocent image from THE MIGHTY MORPHIN' POWER RANGERS, Thuy Trang plays Kali.

Consequently, the sequel promises the sort of production values that helped make the original so memorable. "I think one of the big stars of the first movie was Alex McDowell," said Pope, who had worked with the production designer for several years early in his video career. "This film was a wonderful opportunity for me to work with him again. [CITY OF ANGELS] is a film that is very dependent on its style."

McDowell worked closely with Pope to realize his dark, neo-Gothic version of L.A. "We treated the real locations as much like sets as possible," said the production designer, in order "to almost create our own back lot out of the city, because there was a sense, in the metaphorical world, of these buildings just being facades, held up by the bare minimum supports. I brought earthquake bracing to a lot of locations. We did a similar thing with wooden bracing in the first film, which had more to do with turn-of-the-century Paris. In this case it was very L.A.—these steel earthquake braces that you see all over the place. It was really like the whole city was being propped up." (If this makes the film sound almost like a prequel to ESCAPE FROM L.A., McDowell is quick to admit, "I'm interested to see that, because they came right in our tracks, a month behind us. I think they shot all the same locations.")

McDowell added, "Then we painted out all of the existing graffiti wherever we were and replaced it with our own. It's [part of] that subconscious thing: you've got to believe you're in a parallel world. What we did was invent a new alphabet. We got David Carson from *Raygun* magazine. He took '60s and '70s Chicano graffiti and developed it into this new typeface that was sort of recognizable as a language but not any language in particular. Then we had a local kid, a tagger, learn that alphabet and tag all the buildings. We did 200 to 300 yards of concrete in some locations."

In an effort to lend a nightmarish aura to this parallel

Right: The producers wanted this Crow to run atop buildings as in the first film, but scripter David Goyer insisted on having him ride a motorcycle, pointing out that L.A. has few buildings with connecting roofs. Below: Iggy Pop's villain is cornered in a tunnel by Ashe.

world, the director turned to sodium lights, which emit a yellow illumination similar to some street lamps. The idea for this lighting occurred to Pope after a mugging in New York three years ago—beneath a street lamp. "I remember lying on the sidewalk, thinking, 'Hm, there's a movie here,'" Pope laughed. "I guess that's at the heart of CITY OF ANGELS: you're an innocent victim. I thought what was interesting about the first movie was that it established a whole new look—a surreal, dreamlike feeling."

The filmmakers attempted to take that dreamlike aura from THE CROW and expand it into the larger palette of the sequel. "The look of the film is tremendously different—virtually night and day," claimed Jeff Most. "There is no film that has ever accomplished what we have with this lighting; it created an atmosphere which is symbolic of a kind of other-worldly Los Angeles, not Los Angeles *per se*. The streets are the same, but there are no recognizable icons. It's the 'City of Angels,' which is a nickname. Inasmuch as it's a nickname, it could be anywhere. It certainly is inspired by Los Angeles—this *is* a Gothic-looking town."

Having worked on the first CROW, McDowell's challenge was to bring this new look to life without repeating himself. "What I didn't want," said the production designer, "was to go back into a wet environment—which is the natural thing to do at night, because of being able to get a kick from the lights. What we hit upon, instead, was to use broken glass, so within the decay you get these beautiful streets of golden sparkles. We used tons of broken glass on locations; we covered the streets, so you got a lot of reflection but at the same time had that crystalline overtone. Then we used smoke and smog as a layer throughout, so you had something to hold the light in the air, in a way that is realistic to the place, rather than just in a music video way. The d.p., Jean Yves Escoffier, added this incredible color lighting palette to everything: he put clouds of smoke in the sky and backlit everything with really strong yellow, red, or green."

DIRECTOR TIM POPE

"We're not doing THE CROW II. We're making something completely different, while being responsible to the memory of Brandon Lee. I think the audience will respond to that."

Tim Pope directs Kirshner as Sarah, tattooing a customer at the Grey Gargoyle.

"We restricted the palette in terms of our colors," Pope added."I wanted to create a very oppressive feeling with the lighting, so we used the idea of yellow; we never used blue in the movie. I never saw SEVEN, but from what I've seen, it looks like it took the ideas from THE CROW way further. I thought, 'Well, we'll have to do something different here, something fresher.'

This color palette even extended to the automobiles seen on location. "We took all the modern cars out," McDowell said. "The vehicle rules stated '65 to '79 were the only acceptable cars, and then only in off-white, red, and black, no blues. Like the first film, it was a very controlled palette, but in this case it was a brighter palette. It also has the effect subliminally of the audience getting used to it. That's the idea: that we look at the world through our own filter, and hopefully all of these things combine to seduce the audience into believing in the world, so that there's nothing to take them out of it."

Pope promises that this attention to background detail is not just fancy wallpaper. His plan is to build an entire world upon a psychological foundation of expressionism. "There are many rules to the world we created," he said. "We didn't just create a look. Every set has a psychology to it. There's an idea of destiny at the center of this movie. There are a lot of tunnels in this film: Iggy Pop dies in a tunnel; we filmed in a lot of slim sets. No one is going to notice that idea, but it was absolutely there. There is a kind of logic to the world we've created. Something I liked about the last movie was that it had a real sense that the camera descended into this world, and there were all these characters trapped in little rat-runs. Ultimately none of them could get out until destiny had been fulfilled. We took that idea somewhat further."

When special effects were needed, Pope preferred a minimalist approach. Instead of using the effects to create the CROW's world, he decided they should serve to open it up, transcend budgetary limitations, and create a vaster canvas based out of what was already there. A detailed model of the City of Angels was created for the bird to fly over, but even these shots were dictated by the director's artistic vision and technical proficiency.

"I've never really been blinded by science," said Pope who had plenty of effects experience from his video days. "I didn't want the special effects to stand out as separate elements, so we've shot them in strange ways, with hand-held cameras to make them feel like part of the same movie. It's been quite good fun. I tried not to use motion-control cameras. There are a few instances where we do, but with all the new technologies I was able to shoot a few shots hand-held and sort out the problems later on. It was an interesting technical challenge. We're getting an interesting feel from the special effects. I think there are very few sequences in the movie where you come to a shot and know there's going to be a special effect unfolding before you."

Whenever possible Pope insisted on realism, such as a stunt man's skyscraper dive instead of blue screen and CGI. Perez trained with stunt coordinator Douglas Coleman and practiced fighting, swimming, and diving to prepare for his arduous shoot."I'd say the most difficult sequence was setting fire to Iggy Pop's balls," joked Pope. "It was a tough thing for him, anyway—poor guy.

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With little continuity provided by the first film, David Goyer created a new script mostly from the premise of O'Barr's original graphic novel.

ADVENTURES OF PINOCCHIO

A classic tale comes back to life—this time in live-action.

By Lawrence French

The year was 1881, the place Florence, Italy, when Carlo Collodi, an impoverished Italian journalist badly in need of money to pay his gambling debts, began writing a serialized children's story, *Avventure di Pinocchio*. Collodi's episodic tale was destined for immortality, for 59 years later it became the basis of Walt Disney's celebrated animated film. However, the film was very different from what Collodi had envisioned. His hero was a malicious wooden child, who was closer to a juvenile delinquent than the innocent puppet portrayed by Disney. In a telling incident from the book, Collodi's Cricket is a pontificating bore, whom Pinocchio swiftly eliminates, by smashing him with a hammer. So much for a conscience.

Martin Landau plays Geppetto, alongside the Henson Creature Shop's puppet.

Fifty-six years after the Disney PINOCCHIO was first unveiled, a live-action version of Collodi's tale, THE ADVENTURES OF PINOCCHIO will arrive at theaters on July 26th. The film was directed by Steve Barron, who has long been enthralled with the original story. "PINOCCHIO is a project I always wanted to do," said Barron. "I initially tried to do it with Jim Henson, and I went around to various studios, starting with Disney. There was very little interest at the time, and I ended up abandoning the project." Barron went on to film TEENAGE NINJA MUTANT TURTLES, which included a homage to PINOCCHIO. "The whole idea of a place that was so much fun for kids that they'd want to be bad to get there came right out of PINOCCHIO," admitted Barron. "Then a few years ago I got a script for PINOCCHIO from producers Donald Kushner and Peter Locke. That immediately re-kindled my love for the story."

Despite his attraction to the material, Barron faced a daunting task, since his live-action version will inevitably be compared to the Disney classic. "The overriding reason for doing this," explained Barron, "is it will be much more real than a cartoon could ever be. In terms of emotional attachment, it's very hard to relate to a drawing of a wooden boy. We have a real wooden boy, created by the Henson creature shop, and later on a real human boy, played by Jonathan Taylor Thomas. That makes it quite distinct, and I think that once people see the movie, it will be a completely different world for them, even though it's based on the same characters."

Another distinction is Barron's desire to remain closer to the original book. "In Disney's film, Pinocchio was a total innocent who gets involved with the wrong people," noted Barron, "while in our version, he is more mischievous. In the Collodi story, even though Pinocchio is mean and wicked, you still like him. All the characters were fighting with each other, and people were dying on every other page, but you always loved Pinocchio. We have pulled back on making him too mean, because in the days when Collodi was writing, it was more about grabbing people's attention. It was also written as a serialized story, so each episode had to be a complete story in itself. That meant there was a little bit of repetition. In the book, Pinocchio doesn't really have a learning curve. He just goes on being naughty and wicked."

To play Geppetto, the kindly old woodcarver who creates Pinocchio, Barron cast Martin Landau, shortly before he won his well deserved Oscar (for playing Bela Lugosi in ED WOOD). "I liked the script a lot—it really moved me," said Landau, "but it needed some rounding out, so we added elements which made it really rich. I wanted an arc for Geppetto, and I played him as a man who's afraid of people, afraid of intimacy, and afraid of commitment. Instead he goes home and plays with his toys. He makes marionettes, and that's his family. I wanted you to feel that there's no way this man, who is so set in his ways, would ever have a wife and family. Then by the end of the movie he has both. He learns to express himself and learns to touch his feelings, so it's an interesting trip for him. When I first met with Steve, we talked about what I wanted Geppetto to be, to see if we were both of the same mind, and we were. My input was paid attention to, and that meant there was some re-writing to be done."

The main figure of evil in the movie is Lorenzini, who turns into the sea monster. (Lorenzini was Collodi's real last name. Collodi is the name of a city in Tuscany, which he used as his pseudonym). He has two sidekicks who help him track Pinocchio: the cunning cat, Felinet, voiced by Bebe Neuwirth, and Volpe, the fox, voiced by Rob Schneider. "Lorenzini owns a puppet show, and ends up getting Pinocchio away from me," explains Landau. "Pinocchio goes into a bakery and devastates the entire place, out of his naivete. I'm arrested, since I'm responsible for Pinocchio. Be-

cause I can't pay the fine, I end up having to give him away to Lorenzini, who will pay the fine for me, and that leaves me free to try and get him back."

Aiding Geppetto's quest to retrieve Pinocchio is Leona, the object of Geppetto's unrequited love since his youth. "Genevieve Bujold (DEAD RINGERS) plays Leona, and Pinocchio becomes the catalyst for reuniting Geppetto with Leona," remarked Barron. "Leona, in turn, is the mother figure for Pinocchio, instead of the Blue Fairy. We decided we didn't need to have a Fairy come along and wave a wand that brings Pinocchio to life."

Landau, a consummate professional, approaches each role with thorough preparation. "I went to Czechoslovakia two weeks before we started filming, because I had to do certain things in the movie, and I wanted to know how to do them correctly," said the actor. "I took woodcarving and marionette lessons, so it would look authentic on screen. I also took horse and cart lessons, because I drive a two-wheel cart down some precipitous hills, and 'Wooah' don't mean shit to a Czech horse. You have to say 'Brrrh.' If I couldn't stop that horse, we'd have gone right over the edge! I'm playing it with a slight Italian accent, but I didn't want to make it too heavy, because we have a lot of dialects in the movie. There's Udo Kier and a lot of English actors, so I wanted to get the essence of an Italian accent, without it being total Italian—whereas doing Bela Lugosi, I felt it was very important to get a perfect Hungarian accent. If you look at the Disney movie, Geppetto was not Italian. He was more like a little old winemaker, with a German Alps accent."

Ironically, after spending years trying to interest studios in a live-action PINOCCHIO, Barron suddenly found himself faced with the possible competition of a musical version, which Francis Ford Coppola was attempting to set up at Columbia. "That was one of the factors that helped us to get ours moving," recalled Barron. "They really wanted to steam-roller it through, and although Martin had worked with Coppola on TUCKER, I think Francis actually wanted to use Marcello Mastroianni as Geppetto."

Barron chose to film in the Czech Republic because it was far cheaper than shooting in England or Italy. "We saved about $3 million," said the director, "and that meant more money would show up on the screen. There's also a little town south of Prague where you could point the camera in any direction, and still be in the right period. We're borrowing from periods in both the 18th and 19th century. I wanted a classic feel to the production design, and we tried to give everything a kind of earthy look to it, but still have colors that are vibrant. We went for a seductive, contrasty atmosphere that would really draw you in and make you part of this world, but at the same time wasn't a complete fantasy, like in DICK TRA-

PINOCCHIO'S PUPPETMASTER

Art house actor Udo Kier moves into the Hollywood mainstream.

By Steve Biodrowski

In Europe, he's known for a wide variety of roles in numerous art house films from directors like Fassbinder and Lars Von Triers. In America, he is known mostly to cult movie fans for his performance in the title roles of two films written and directed (in spite of the misleading titles supplied by their U.S. distributor) by Paul Morrisey: ANDY WARHOL'S FRANKENSTEIN and ANDY WARHOL'S DRACULA. Over the last few years, sharp-eyed movie goers have begun to notice his name and face popping up in American productions, such as MY OWN PRIVATE IDAHO and FOR LOVE OR MONEY, and he made a typically scene-stealing appearance (although don't tell him that—he hates the phrase) in JOHNNY MNEMONIC, as Ralphie, Johnny's double-crossing agent.

In THE ADVENTURES OF PINOCCHIO, Udo Kier is Lorenzini, the Puppetmaster, who combines elements of all three of the villains from the Disney cartoon, including Monstro.

The actor, of course, is Udo Kier, and his most recent role was as Pamela Anderson Lee's sidekick in BARB WIRE. Soon, he will be appearing in what will probably be his most highly visible role to date, as far as American audiences are concerned—as Lorenzini, the evil villain opposing Martin Landau's Geppetto in THE ADVENTURES OF PINOCCHIO. "I play the Puppet Master," explained Kier. "If you recall, in the cartoon there were three bad guys: the evil Puppet Master, who ran the circus; the teacher, who changed the children into donkeys; and the sea monster at the end. So they combined it into one; I play all three, as one person, and at the end I become the sea monster. We did a lot with mirrors, these distorting mirrors that you see at a fun house. I run into this tent with all these mirrors, and the transformation takes place. Then I go underwater."

Kier's makeup, as both the Puppet Master and as the monster, was provided by Jim Henson's Creature Shop. "The normal makeup took one-and-a-half hours every day, because they worked a lot in close-ups, so it had to be perfect. I had a false nose, a beard, a mustache, eyebrows, and a wig. It looked really great. I like that, to play a person that doesn't look like

me. At the end, when I transform into the sea monster, that was four-and-a-half hours. That was a little bit tiring, because you spend half of the day just in makeup; you have to be in a meditational mood so that you don't wear yourself out growing into the character; otherwise, you're tired after five hours. You just have to relax."

Kier's sea monster scenes were filmed not dry-for-wet but actually underwater, "with a lot of tricks I won't tell you," to be enhanced with opticals in post-production. "As the sea monster, I didn't have to work that much, because they knew it was very difficult to wear [the makeup]. But still, you work twelve hours. Audiences always think, 'How easy it is to be an actor!' They don't know you work sometimes fifteen or sixteen hours. Of course, you don't *work* [the whole time], but the waiting time is even worse, because you have to hold your concentration the whole day and drink a lot of coffee—every actor has his own system. You're really wired and tired after fifteen hours. You have to stay totally concentrated, because you might be called at any moment, and then you have to be again in that personality."

One of the film's major acting challenges was performing opposite the title character. "In DRACULA and FRANKENSTEIN, there were a lot of effects but simple effects—nothing like this. This was the first time [I was acting to an effect]. A puppet is a puppet—you know it's a puppet. I could not as an actor get so deeply involved that all of a sudden I'm talking to a doll. They said it was good, and they liked what I did. But you never know. Just because other people like what I do doesn't mean I myself like it when I see it."

Along with the technique of working with a puppet, Kier also adapted to another cinematic innovation which he had been avoiding. "I am just now, after thirty years, starting to watch myself in the monitor. I never did before, because I don't feel comfortable watching myself. I've worked with a lot of American actors: after the scene, they go to the monitor; then they do the scene again, and they do it better. If an actor sees himself in a monitor, I don't think the acting improves. What you see in the monitor is position. Maybe you can adjust your head a little bit, or your hands. Mainly, you adjust your body, your movement, and not the acting—because the acting, you either have it or you don't have it. So I think I'm going to learn how to see myself in a monitor, even though I hate it.

"Sometimes they forced me to see the monitor, because I had to be in an exact position for Pinocchio, because it was very technical stuff," added Kier. "I saw myself looking at Pinocchio, and I knew I could adjust a little bit. Because if a director says, 'Be in profile a little more,' you don't know exactly what they mean by it unless you see the monitor; then you adjust."

For all of the technical challenges, there were some aesthetic rewards, such as working with Martin Landau—"a wonderful man and a great actor," according to Kier. "Many of my scenes were with Martin Landau, who is amazing. I am not so well known in this country, so I've had a lot of experience with stars and how they behave. If you don't have the same trailer as they do, they treat you not as they should. With Martin Landau—well, I had the same trailer as he, but still it was like...even when he was off-camera, then you see if an actor is really professional. When he was off camera, he was giving me the same energy as when he was on-camera. You know, you have actors that, when they're off camera, they're cleaning their fingernails, and they just say the lines. He was totally doing his performance."

Also rewarding, at least initially, was shooting the film in Prague. "I had never been in Prague before," he said. "The first few weeks, it's like a Disney tour—unreal. I'm talking about the center. If you go a little bit out of the center, which of course the tours never do, then you see the poor people and how they live in these big blocks of buildings—very depressing. We had to work in Prague a lot, even Saturdays; we only had Sunday off, which is short. But if the result is good, who cares?"

Although the film was not produced on the blockbuster budget scale of other live-action remakes, for Kier it is still what he hopes will be a major step forward in his American career. "It is very spectacular," he said enthusiastically. "For me, as an actor, it is interesting, because people in America especially have seen me only in comedies like ACE VENTURA: PET DETECTIVE, FOR LOVE OR MONEY, and JOHNNY MNEMONIC, which was a mixture of a very evil and comical character. I think this is a pure villain. I understand from history that the Germans always have to play the villain. That's okay. I like to play the villain, actually, because that's the role people remember. They never remember the good guys; they remember the bad guys and say, 'Oh, he is evil!' So it's more highly dramatic to play a bad guy—more dramatic light, more dramatic situations, everything—because they have to build the villain up.

"There's a lot of villains I'd really like to play," he continued. "There's a lot of remakes I'd like to do. My favorite one of course would be the movie, M. There's so many movies, but then they were so strong in black-and-white that, technically, I don't know how that would look in color today. Films like THE THIRD MAN had such great dramatic lighting. In that period, there were people like Sternberg, Lubitsch, and Murnau—all the immigrants—who were so strong with that lighting. They were experts who did the maximum for that time, which maybe Michael Balhaus does today in Scorsese's films in color. To tell someone today who's a master of color to go back is very difficult." □

"I understand from history that Germans always have to play the villain. That's okay. I like to play the villain, because that's the role people remember."

Kier has long been known to U.S. genre audiences for the gross-out camp comedies FLESH FOR FRANKENSTEIN and BLOOD FOR DRACULA (above).

Thanks to modern special effects live-action filmmaking can now capture the fantasy elements that made the Disney film so memorable, such as Pinocchio's famous nose that grows when he tells a lie. Above: Jonathan Taylor Thomas as the boy Pinocchio becomes.

CY. We were trying for a more realistic fantasy, where the grit and texture were meeting a sort of color that brought you just off the edge of reality. It was treading a very narrow line."

To create this visual environment, Barron picked several key collaborators, including production designer Allan Cameron and cinematographer Juan Ruiz-Anchia, who had impressed Barron with his lush color work on Disney's live-action version of THE JUNGLE BOOK. "Juan is brave and adventurous," said Barron, "and I asked him to push for things that hadn't been done before in this kind of movie. I wanted to be able to play with light, and we found scenes in the movie where we could do that. We have scenes that are bathed in color, and we were able to experiment a little bit."

To shoot background scenes involving the ocean—"There's no ocean in the Czech Republic," noted Landau—the company spent a week in Croatia, on the Yugoslavian coast, before the war with Bosnia went ballistic. Additional ocean scenes, involving a sea monster (the film's equivalent of Monstro), were done with a mixture of CGI and studio tank work. The job of creating a realistic live-action Pinocchio fell to Jamie Courtier, the project supervisor on the film from Jim Henson's Creature Shop. "We didn't set out to make a puppet that was a dead ringer for Jonathan Taylor Thomas," explained Courtier. "We developed a puppet that resembled him closely enough so when Jonathan appears on the screen for the first time, audiences will accept that he is Pinocchio. There was a degree of Jonathan in the design. If you look closely at the eyes, the skin color, and the mouth, it will be quite clear."

With a budget of $25 million, Barron needed to pre-determine the kinds of movements that could be accomplished with the puppet. "It was a potential nightmare," said the director, "because we have a little wooden puppet, with spindly arms and legs, walking around for the whole movie. We had to plan what we were going to be able to do, versus what we might have wanted to do; otherwise it could become a $50 million movie. We did a lot of storyboards, and I always got input from the effects people. A lot of times they would say, 'That's going to be complicated. How about if we did a set-up this way?' That allowed us to find a way to pull it off, without going crazy."

Mack Wilson headed the team of puppeteers that bring movement and mobility to the animatronic puppet. "Pinocchio was right there and could act with Martin Landau 95% of the time," marveled Barron. "We had a puppeteer doing Pinocchio's voice on the set, and Martin could literally bounce off the puppet. Martin was really pleasantly surprised that he could interact with this little wooden puppet. He thought he was going to do a lot more waving of his arms, and acting in front of a blue screen."

Landau concurred, saying, "It was very hands on, which is what I liked about it. When I walked down the street with Pinocchio, there were five puppeteers in blue suits to make him move. Mack Wilson would be at the console, making the expressions on Pinocchio's face. He had a pair of electronic gloves, and each finger would do a different thing to the muscles in Pinocchio's face. Wilson could play it like a virtuoso. He was really an actor who translated expressions from his fingertips to Pinocchio's face. When reporters came to visit the set, I would improvise with Pinocchio. I'd say things like, 'Well, Pinocchio, do you have any work lined-up after this?' and he'd reply, 'There's not a lot of work for my type.' We could do a half hour of that, without blinking an eye, and Pinocchio's eye's do blink. We didn't do improvisation in the movie, because Jonathan Taylor Thomas pre-recorded all of Pinocchio's dialogue. He's at that age [13], where his voice could have changed at any second. He also had to get back to do HOME IMPROVEMENT, which meant we had to shoot the end of the movie first, the metamorphosis of Pinocchio into a real boy. It's a hugely emotional scene. Geppetto has accepted the responsibility of fatherhood, and actually uses the word 'love' for the first time. When his tears flow, Pinocchio becomes a real boy."

In a scene typical of the challenges facing the film, Landau walks with Pinocchio down a street, followed by the team of puppeteers who bring the puppet to life.

Although Landau didn't have to act with a nonexistent co-star, he still found it challenging to focus solely on Pinocchio. "I had to disregard lots of move-

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ESCAPE FROM L

Snake Plissken is back in John Carpenter's "Cowboy Noir."

By Michael Beeler

Roaring through the barren landscape on a beefed-up Harley Davidson, with a patch over one eye, guns strapped to his side, and long hair blowing in the wind, Snake Plissken resembles a futuristic gunslinger riding into the badlands. ESCAPE FROM L.A. may be set in an earthquake-devastated Los Angeles in the year 2013, but it's definitely rooted in Western genre.

"This is what I would call a Cowboy Noir," said director John Carpenter of his long awaited follow-up to ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK. "Plissken is a gun fighter who literally straps on his two guns and has to go and deal with things."

Now wearing a "stealth suit," Kurt Russell returns as Snake Plissken, the role that helped overturn his teen Disney image.

Dealing with things is what Plissken, played by Kurt Russell as a sort of stylized Clint Eastwood of the 21st Century, does with a gritty vengeance throughout the film. Coerced by his country once again to do the impossible, he is injected with a supposedly lethal virus and given ten hours to retrieve a secret weapon that has fallen into the hands of a group of bad guys. Initially, he is transported by submarine to the shores of Los Angeles, which due to seismic activity has become an island. There, the one-eyed outlaw must fight his way through a hostile wasteland filled with warring gangs, gun-toting surfers, savage gladiators, political outcasts, and two-faced miscreants.

"This also resembles a Western in that a lot of the villains are more likable than they are despicable," continued Carpenter, a long time fan of the genre. "If you recall villains like Eli Wallach in THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN—sure, he was the bad guy, but he was so endearing that he made the movie fun. In that sense, it's a lot like a Western. It's also science- fiction, because there are a lot of gizzmos and stuff, but, in essence it's a Western."

With a budget approaching $50 million, this Paramount production was able to afford some very pricey gizzmos and stuff. To begin with, Russell, fresh from his highly paid appearance in STARGATE, didn't come cheap: as star, producer, and co-writer, he made a cool $10 million. Carpenter earned $5 million, and Debra Hill made $2 million. All three, who collaborated on the script, will split 20 percent of the gross receipts.

Along with a supporting cast that included Cliff Robertson, Steve Buscemi, Stacy Keach, Peter Fonda, and Bruce Campbell, the movie employed almost 500 extras as the motley denizens of Los Angeles Island. Working on mammoth sets and numerous L.A. locations, production designer Lawrence Paull commanded an army of technicians, stunt people, miniature builders, matte painters, pyro-technicians, and almost 30 trucks and trailers loaded with gear. Even costuming, which created over a thousand outfits, commandeered three 40 foot trailers during the shoot. Costuming for this production was elaborate, with a distinctive look created for each principle character, as well as for each of the demographic groups: the Hollywood Whores, the downtrodden homeless, the freakish rich of Beverly Hills, the surfer dudes, and the various gangs. Even Plissken's outfit was redesigned to give him a sleeker and more futuristic appearance.

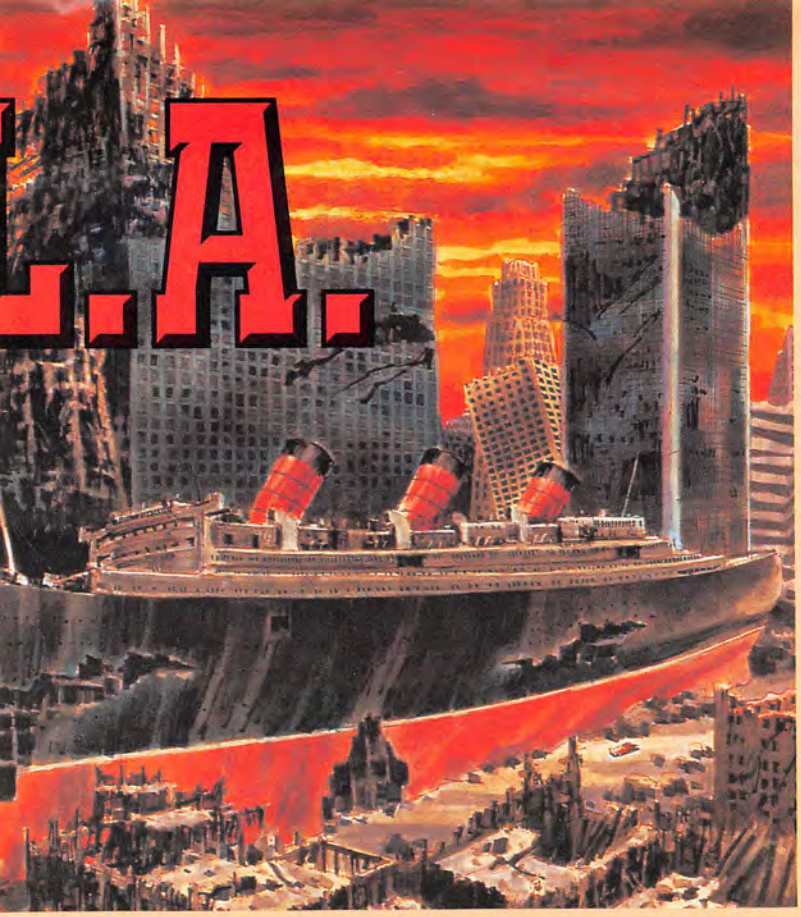
"Kurt's outfit is what we call stealth clothing," explained costume designer Robin Michel Bush. "We wanted him to be able to be undetectable. The costume, like the stealth bomber, visually needed to reflect in sunlight and go black in other light. We couldn't find a fabric on the market that gave us what we wanted, so we actually invented a fabric. We did some silk screening, some bonding of different fabrics, and we came up with the look."

The storyline encompasses a conservative future when outspoken opinions are no longer tolerated. Consequently, the City of the Angels is used as by the government as a dumping ground for society's undesirables, creating an Old West environment where lawlessness rules and more often than not justice belongs to the fastest gun.

ESCAPE FROM L.A. takes place in a futuristic l

"Well, that's true in some scenes," admitted Hill, who fifteen years ago produced the original movie for $7 million. "In other scenes, not necessarily. This movie is not just about gun-toting minorities, although

Riding on a Harley Davidson through the deva to resemble an old-fashioned Western gunfig



os Angeles devastated by earthquake and split off from the rest of California into an island.

it may seem that way in some scenes and especially in the finale, which highlights Cuervo Jones' gang. But there are also some very good people in this film. The heart of this picture is this character Taslima played by Valeria Golino. She's a Muslim that was expelled from The United States for her religious beliefs, and she becomes a victim. To her, [Los Angeles] is the last free place in the world. To most people that are not gun toting, this is where you demonstrate free speech, the freedom of religion, the freedom of having love that may not be the sort

station of Los Angeles Island, Plissken is meant hter who rides into town to take care of things.

dictated by a Christian fundamentalist nation. I'll admit that some of these people, in order to survive in the end, might pick up a gun. But that's just the way that it has to be in this kind of an environment."

Unlike ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK, there is no role, in the sequel that mirrors the antagonistic yet friendly character played by Lee Van Cleef, who died in 1989. "No, we really don't have that type of character," admitted Hill. "I mean, there was a special relationship, an admiration that went between Lee Van Cleef's character and Snake Plissken. I think that would be hard to replace. What you have is an animosity between The President, played by Cliff Robertson, and Snake Plissken. But there is no respect. So there really isn't a replacement of Lee Van Cleef."

What will remain true to the original film is the reluctant attitude and survivalistic mentality of Plissken as he races from one hopeless situation to the next. You can also be sure that once again he will not get the girl. "One of the things that women have said to me over the years about the movie, was that what got them really attracted to this character was the fact that

LA-LA LAND OF THE FREE

"This is not just about gun-toting minorities," said Hill. "There are some good people in the film. To people who are not gun-toting, L.A. is the last free place in the world."

he was inaccessible to them and he didn't try to get them," revealed Carpenter. "Snake doesn't care about anything but staying alive for another sixty seconds. He doesn't care about hurting you. He doesn't care about helping you. He doesn't care about taking you to bed. All he cares about is moving on. And that kind of character, who is essentially self sufficient, is extremely attractive to females. So, we've never really given him the girl—although in this movie he gets very close. He actually has a pretty hot scene with Valeria Golino. You think that maybe if Snake had more time he might consider it. But things don't work out that way."

Amazingly, the making of this sequel almost didn't work out, either. Carpenter is well known within the industry for his negative views regarding sequels, which tend to rehash the original. He is not very proud of his association with the HALLOWEEN sequels, even though he was closely involved in II and III. A number of years ago, during the filming of MEMOIRS OF AN INVISIBLE MAN, Carpenter admitted that he thought about an idea called ESCAPE FROM LA for about fifteen minutes before deciding it wouldn't work.

What made him decide that it would work was a visit by his long-time friend Russell, after the Northridge Earthquake of 1994. Russell explained that after all the riots, floods, fires and violence that have beset Los Angeles in recent years, the only thing that keeps all of us Angelenos from running away in terror is the fact that we're in denial. None of us want to leave while the party is still going on. Russell pitched the idea of setting Plissken in an even more lethal Los Angeles in a future where danger has become an emotional aphrodisiac.

Carpenter loved the idea and eventually brought Hill onboard to help write and produce the project. "It's fun for Kurt, John and me to be back together again," said Hill. "The first night of shooting, Kurt came out in his outfit and looked at me and said, 'I feel like we just wrapped [ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK] on Friday night and this was just a long weekend!'" □

Director John Carpenter confers with star Kurt Russell on one of Lawrence G. Paul's sets. Russell suggested the idea for the sequel to Carpenter.

In A CLOSE SHAVE, Nick Park brings back his lovable creations. Like THE WRONG TROUSERS, the new film begins with light-hearted hijinks—Wallace and Gromit's window-washing service (above)—before thrusting the characters into a pastiche of a Hitchcockian suspense plot, involving an innocent sheep (below), which leads to Gromit's false arrest for sheep-rustling.

WALLACE

ANIMATION'S OSCAR-

Stop-motion guru Nick

Ardman Animation, the British producer of stop-motion commercials and short subjects, has numerous entertaining films to its credit, including CREATURE COMFORTS, PIB AND POG and THE INFINITE VARIETY SHOW, but the company's "crown jewels" (as producer Michael Rose puts it) have to be Nick Park's delightful duo of Wallace and Gromit.

The characters have their roots in Park's early sketchbook, and they first took shape in A GRAND DAY OUT, the Oscar-nominated short that Park began as a school project and completed at Ardman. After directing CREATURE COMFORTS, Park brought Wallace and Gromit back to even greater acclaim with THE WRONG TROUSERS, which won the animated short subject Oscar in 1994. Now, he has brought the characters back once again, in another Oscar-winning effort—their best yet—A CLOSE SHAVE. (For those keeping score, each of Park's four films have been nominated; the only one that didn't win, A GRAND DAY OUT, lost to his own CREATURE COMFORTS.)

So, what was it like going back and trying to follow up a film that had won an Academy Award? "I think that was the real pressure after the success of THE WRONG TROUSERS," admitted Ardman producer Michael Rose, who serves as the company's head of development. "It was really a question of 'What do we do next?' I think the pressure was on Nick right from the start, and he came up with a wonderful idea for a screenplay and found something new to do in a third film."

"It was difficult, actually," said Park, interviewed while in town to pick up his third Oscar. "It was a hard act to follow. It's only afterward, when you try to do it again, that you realize you just hit on a magical formula which seemed to work. It was very hard to write something that was going to work again."

In a way, Park had an even greater challenge than with his first sequel, WRONG TROUSERS. GRAND DAY OUT is an amusing piece of filmmaking, in which Wallace and Gromit take a trip to the moon, but the storytelling is fairly basic, leaving adequate room for improvement. WRONG TROUSERS, on the other hand, took the eccentric comic characters and put them in the middle of a Hitchcockian suspense plot—a pastiche as finely executed as any live-action thriller. After that stroke of brilliance, what more could Park do with A CLOSE SHAVE? "In a way," said Park, "I didn't try to make it better—that could have been a mistake, so I tried to make something that was different and had other ingredients—like the romance, for example. We still had a chase sequence and a sort of Hitchcockian atmosphere.

"I did *want* to make a better chase sequence, but I'm dubious of that at the same time," Park continued. "I'm always a little bit dubious of sequels that just look at what was in the last one and try to make it bigger—like bigger explosions. I didn't want to just get into pyrotechnics or

BY STEVE BIODROWSKI

& GROMIT A CLOSE SHAVE

WINNING CARTOON DUO

Park on their latest adventure.

technically thrilling bits. It does look more sophisticated, but that wasn't intentional, really. It comes from more people working on it; the story itself required more, because there are five characters in this one and thirty sheep. It was complicated, and there were a lot more shots. That's why it seems to be more fast moving, more condensed—which wasn't always my intention. I was always worried that that might be too much. The subtle aspects of THE WRONG TROUSERS—I would like to have maintained that a bit more. It's not the technically sophisticated flying sequences that make it; it's the looks on Gromit's face—it's the emotions that matter. And the chase sequences have to have emotional content as well. I think we did it, but ideally I would like to have given the whole film a bit more breathing space. Our stricture was fitting the whole thing into thirty minutes."

That thirty-minute limitation was the result of financing. "Although our films are made for cinema, they are usually financed by television money," explained Rose. "That is why there's so much stop-motion coming out of England: we have access to TV money to produce it. That means we have not been able to do much theatrical [distribution] in England. A CLOSE SHAVE was finished in November last year and was on television for Christmas, whereas abroad we have a window of a year. Ironically, our films are seen more theatrically abroad."

How did the sequel come to be? "It's a slow process that happens from a lot of discussions," said Park. "Basically, it comes from us thinking what we want to do next. I talk about it to Peter Lord and Dave Broxton, the co-founders of Ardman; they've actually made me a director of the company as well. Also, we have this general policy that we want to make films of our own ideas."

Nick Park's "Plasticine Pals," as he calls them, Wallace and Gromit.

Part of the impetus was that the BBC, who co-financed THE WRONG TROUSERS with Ardman, wanted a follow-up. "That was so successful for them that they came back to us and said, 'Let's do another Wallace and Gromit film,'" said Park. "I wasn't against the idea; I liked the idea. Really, I wanted to make something longer. I wanted to make a feature film, but we thought, 'We're not really ready for that yet; it would be good to get some more practice making a short.' And the BBC really wanted another holiday special."

Park took the opportunity to expand the scope of A CLOSE SHAVE, adding another speaking character so that Wallace could at last have a real dialogue, as opposed to simply speaking to his silent dog, Gromit. He also came up with a supporting cast of sheep, who provide much of the comedy this time. The idea may not sound promising—may even sound ludicrous—but part of Park's genius lies in the humor derived from the absurdity of his outrageous concepts.

"It's like the other ideas, like the penguin [from WRONG TROUSERS]; it goes back to my early sketchbook," said Park. "I've found that all these ideas have their roots in earlier ideas. You don't know it at the time; it must be like a stream of consciousness. It's whatever grabs you, whatever you like. If there's something I can't stop thinking about, that's what I want to do. So I'm led by that feeling of 'What do I enjoy? What have I loved since being a kid? What's always fascinated me?' Which maybe explains the broad appeal—which I can't explain [otherwise]—to some extent: I'm trying to make the things I wanted to see as a kid. Also, it's got to work for me now as an adult, so I bring in all these filmic devices and techniques to make it more of a movie."

Speaking of reviving earlier ideas, Park's initial concept for WRONG TROUSERS was that a flock of penguins, not just the solitary criminal Feathers McGraw, would invade the home of Wallace and Gromit. For A CLOSE SHAVE, he seems to have revived the idea but replaced the penguins with sheep. "Actually, you're right, because there were going to be a lot of penguins that cause havoc, and then I narrowed it down to one," said Park. "It's funny—as if those ideas were there from the beginning, and you just discover them. In A GRAND DAY OUT, on the wall there's a picture of sheep. I don't know why I did it—it just made it more interesting. I thought it was a curiosity that people would analyze in the future. I didn't realize then that sheep would be in a future film."

The film repeats some motifs from WRONG TROUSERS but in new variations. For instance, this time Gromit is wrongly imprisoned—and ends up in the jail cell occupied by Feathers at the end of WRONG TROUSERS. (This may only be apparent to sharp-eyed viewers who note the graffito on the wall: "Feathers was here.") "I seem to have a fascination with zoos and prisons, as in CREATURE COMFORTS," Park admitted. "The zoo phenomenon is interesting—prisons, being captive—maybe because it has resonances for people; it's all about 'What is freedom?' We've always been able to relate to animals. A lot of our culture—all cultures really—are about animals, using them for metaphors. They somehow

A CLOSE SHAVE

REVIEW

"...raises stop-motion to new levels..."

A CLOSE SHAVE

An Ardman Animation Production. Produced by Carla Shelley and Michael Rose. Directed by Nick Park. Written by Park and Bob Baker. Executive producers, Peter Lord & David Sproxton. Director of photography, Dave Alex Riddett. Art direction, Phil Lewis, Trisha Budd. Key character animator, Steve Box. Edited by Helen Garrard. Music, Julian Nott. 30 minutes, April 1996.

Wallace.....Peter Sallis
Wendolene.....Ann Reid

by Mike Lyons and Jay Stevenson

In A CLOSE SHAVE, Nick Park adds romance to the mix, introducing a new speaking character, Wendolene, with whom Wallace falls in love.

After watching a Nick Park film one feels a sense of gratitude toward the filmmaker. Not only does Park raise the art of stop-motion to new levels by taking full advantage of its visual possibilities, but he also takes the time to use it wonderfully in the quieter segments. There's a scene in his latest effort, A CLOSE SHAVE, in which Gromit watches his master, Wallace, become smitten with a woman of dubious distinction. The dog's brow rises and his shoulders sag in despair. It's some of the best acting you've ever seen.

That's just one of many marvels in A CLOSE SHAVE, which earned Park his third Oscar this March for 1995's Best Animated Short Subject. The film received theatrical play in America as part of the anthology "Wallace and Gromit: The Best of Ardman Animation." The quality of animation produced at Ardman is quite high, with several amusing entries on view, such as REX THE RUNT and THE ADVENTURES OF PIB AND POG. But the true highlight of the evening is Park's work, which included his previous Oscar-winner, CREATURE COMFORTS, several BBC TV commercials (immediately identifiable by the characters' wide-mouthed, toothy pronunciation), and, now, A CLOSE SHAVE.

In this latest adventure, Park once again brings back his two bug-eyed heroes, Wallace, the English inventor, and his dog, Gromit, who appears to be the real brains of the outfit. The two find themselves tangled up in a sheep-poaching scandal, after innocently adopting a little sheep named Sean. Along the way, Wallace finds love with a woman who looks terrifyingly like him in drag and who owns a strong silent bulldog, that looks like a 3-D version of a Tex Avery character.

What unravels is a story so full of action and atmosphere that, if his animation ever dries up (doubtful), Park may have a great career as a film noir director. A CLOSE SHAVE is filled with ominous music and stylish camera angles. The fact that this Hitchcockian sense of dread is used as the backdrop for such innocent looking characters makes the proceedings all the more hysterical.

Park knows not only how to create laughter subtly (it's no wonder *Time*'s film critic Richard Corliss has compared Gromit to Buster Keaton), and through slapstick (mostly supplied by Wallace's Rube Goldberg-like inventions, which include a way to combine bungee jumping and window washing), but also through great bits of dialogue that seemingly come out of nowhere. After Gromit is accused of the sheep-stealing, Wallace muses, "You'll be hunted down like...well...a dog."

When Gromit is wrongly jailed, Sean and his fellow flock stage a jail break that defies description (when you see a sheep wielding a buzz saw to cut through metal bars, you know you've experienced a new level of creativity). It all culminates in a jaw-dropping chase scene that defies the laws of perpetual motion, and a witty take-off on THE TERMINATOR (which some may view as Park's comment on emerging computer technology).

A CLOSE SHAVE, like the previous Wallace and Gromit adventures, A GRAND DAY OUT and THE WRONG TROUSERS, packs more into its brief length and is ultimately more satisfying than many full-length features. Park has created two wonderful personalities in which all audiences can find small pieces of themselves. A CLOSE SHAVE should allow them to join the upper echelon of Toontown's residents. The short will no doubt satisfy Park's devotees and increase his growing legion of fans, as we all wait for him to display his artistry on a larger canvas in a feature debut. □

speak to us by their situation. I can't get too deep about it, but I thought there might be something in that."

One of the more memorable visual gags from WRONG TROUSERS was the sight of Feathers, the penguin criminal, wielding a gun. Park tops that in A CLOSE SHAVE with the even more deliciously absurd sight of a sheep wielding a power saw to cut the bars from Gromit's prison cell. Park credits this sort of inspired lunacy to long hours of script sessions. "I worked with the same writer as on WRONG TROUSERS, Bob Baker, who was involved with DR. WHO for years when Tom Baker was playing the role, and John Pertwee. It was a combination of his kind of traditional British writing, which is very much like Ealing comedies, plus my own cartoon sense. When we're writing, we sit there for ages, looking into our cups and not thinking of anything, stuck, and what goes into the script is what makes us laugh, because suddenly we'll think of something and crack up. That's the way it works, really; we just talk a lot, and it's whatever gets that reaction."

Because the home invaders in this film—i.e., the sheep—turn out to be benevolent, that left the villain role open. Park came up with Preston, a nefarious dog who turns out to be a robot. "I always have loved robots," said Park, "especially in old-fashioned, very simple '50s robots, like in Bugs Bunny cartoons, where they just fed in a piece of paper with a rabbit on it. I've never really seen that done with plasticine—although the cyber-dog wasn't plasticine—in this kind of movie. I suppose it's a traditional sci-fi thing: somebody turns out to be a robot. It was just a good twist in the story, partly because no one had suspected it, although we telegraphed it early."

The revelation occurs late in the film when Preston's fur is removed by Wallace's Knit-O-Matic (one of his many Rube Goldberg-type contraptions). "To a lot of people, that's obviously [derived from] TERMINATOR," said Park. "I think people are right, and I think the music enhances that [perception], as well. That did cross my

mind. I think a lot of these influences, which seem like film references, are often just things that occur to you at the time. You might describe it to somebody like TERMINATOR, because it's the most obvious thing. I try to weigh the references very lightly; I don't want to copy bits from films. I'm trying to put across atmospheres of certain films that I've grown up with, like Hitchcock."

Typical of animation, Park's work is carefully scripted and story-boarded so that the film can more or less be edited in the camera, "because you can't afford to keep reshooting and shooting things you won't need," said Park. "We actually shoot the story boards on video; I time the action and shoot it, according to those timings. That gives you an idea how the story's working in terms of pacing, and how well the story's being visually told. Even though that is a rigid story board—or 'animatic,' as we call the video—I'm constantly editing it as we shoot. Because often the way a shot works in reality isn't like the story board. It's got to be adaptable. Animation is such a human endeavor, not a robotic thing, so there's always going to be some improvisation in the way it's shot, in terms of what the animators bring to the characters.

"People are constantly bombarding me with questions, especially with the larger crew on A CLOSE SHAVE, and I hate making decisions in the camera that limit me in terms of editing scenes," Park added. "I'd like to shoot these things like live-action and have as much choice as possible. So I'm always asking the animators to shoot a little bit more: if a character's turning out of frame, I ask the animator to get him out of frame; otherwise, you're stuck with one cutting point."

Are there ever any surprises when the footage is cut together? "Constant surprises!" exclaims Park. "Quite often something makes you laugh when you see it for the first time, when you get the dailies back from the labs. Everyone in the cutting room laughs when you show it on the machine, but then you cut it into the film and it's not funny any more. I shouldn't worry about that, because often it's not the individual shot that's meant to be funny; it's the overall scene that's funny in concept. It's funny how things work in different ways when you edit it. There are certain things that nobody laughs at, and I thought everybody would, and vice versa—bits that everybody laughs at that weren't meant to be that funny. What's more satisfying is when something you have planned works exactly—like the sheep breaking into prison."

"THE WRONG TROUSERS was a hard act to follow. It's only when you try to do something again that you realize you just hit on a magic formula."

Wallace and Gromit's previous film, THE WRONG TROUSERS, introduced the the Hitchcockian tone, with a mysterious boarder revealed to be a criminal.

Although the Ardman staff are pleased that the popularity of Wallace and Gromit has created a demand for more, they are concerned that fulfilling the demand might overrule aesthetic considerations. "We're very fortunate that in England Wallace and Gromit have been established as major characters—stars, almost," said Rose. "Characters like that come along very rarely. You have to be very careful to protect them, to make sure they're not exploited or used cheaply. This is pretty much it for the time being; I think Nick will come back to Wallace and Gromit but not for awhile."

Is it best to move away from Wallace and Gromit? "A lot of people think it isn't, because we've created popularity and the demand for it," said Park. "But I don't want to keep doing them just because they're popular. To me, there's always got to be a new challenge. I don't ever want to be doing something out of repetition—just easy things that I know I can do. The feature format will be a new challenge, and it would keep me sane, in a way."

Park's feature ambitions are apparent in A CLOSE SHAVE, which occasionally seems to be bursting at the seams with ideas which could have been expanded. "I'd have liked it to be longer," admitted Park. "I thought it needed more shots. During some of the busy sequences, it needed more characters' reactions. I think it could have been quite a bit longer. You're right: there's a frustrated feature film in there."

So now the question on the minds of fans is: would Park like to make a Wallace and Gromit feature? "Yeah, I would," he said. "We're planning a feature now, but it's not Wallace and Gromit. Since I started A GRAND DAY OUT in college, I've actually been doing Wallace and Gromit, on and off, for thirteen years. I really feel very strongly for them: they're my babies, and I still think of ideas for them; I would like them to have more of a life, and I'd like to come back to them and do more short films or a feature. I think there would be no problem getting financing for a feature film. But I think for now I just want to get on with some new ideas, new characters."

Park is currently working on the script for the film. Said Rose of the endeavor, "It's been our dream to make a feature, but we've waited a long time until conditions were right. We've been talking to a lot of studios in Hollywood, but we wanted to make sure that we could make the film independently and retain creativity. We've found the right circumstances to do that now, so we're developing our first project, with the aim that we may be in production the autumn of next year. We have a development partnership with Jake Edwards, who co-produced JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH for Disney. He's a one-man operation, backed by substantial funds, and he will finance the production. We want the film to be a big theatrical picture, so we will want a deal with one of the studios down the line. We'd love to be in the cinemas across America."

Rose thinks the market may be right now for a stop-motion feature, thanks to the success of NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS and TOY STORY. "NIGHTMARE was darker and had a narrower audience base, whereas TOY STORY showed that 3-dimensional animation, in place of traditional animation, could capture the entire POCAHONTAS and LION KING market," said the producer. "I think the danger is that everyone's jumping into the act after the success of the Disney films. You've got six studios here churning out animated feature films, and you wonder just how many the

continued on page 61

THEODORE REX, DINOSAURS BY WILLIAM STOUT

The conceptual artist on his saurian design for the direct-to-video fantasy.

By Todd French

Teddy, a Jurassic cop clone of futuristic Grid City, animatronics by Criswell Productions, based on Stout's designs of an evolved saurian.

THEODORE REX, a futuristic 'noir detective tale involving a genetically engineered T-Rex's quest for justice, is artist and production designer William Stout's most recent opportunity to bring life to a breed that spells anything but box-office extinction. Alas, dinosaur buffs and moviegoers may not get to see Stout's work: NewLine Cinema, the distributors of the oft pushed-back film have opted not to go for a theatrical release, but instead chose to relegate director Jonathan Betuel's (MY SCIENCE PROJECT) to the shelf of video obscurity. Stout admits that he has yet to see any footage of the film since the completion of its 58-day shooting schedule in February of 1995. The movie, which was set to be released nationwide December 22, last year, is set to debut in video stores this July.

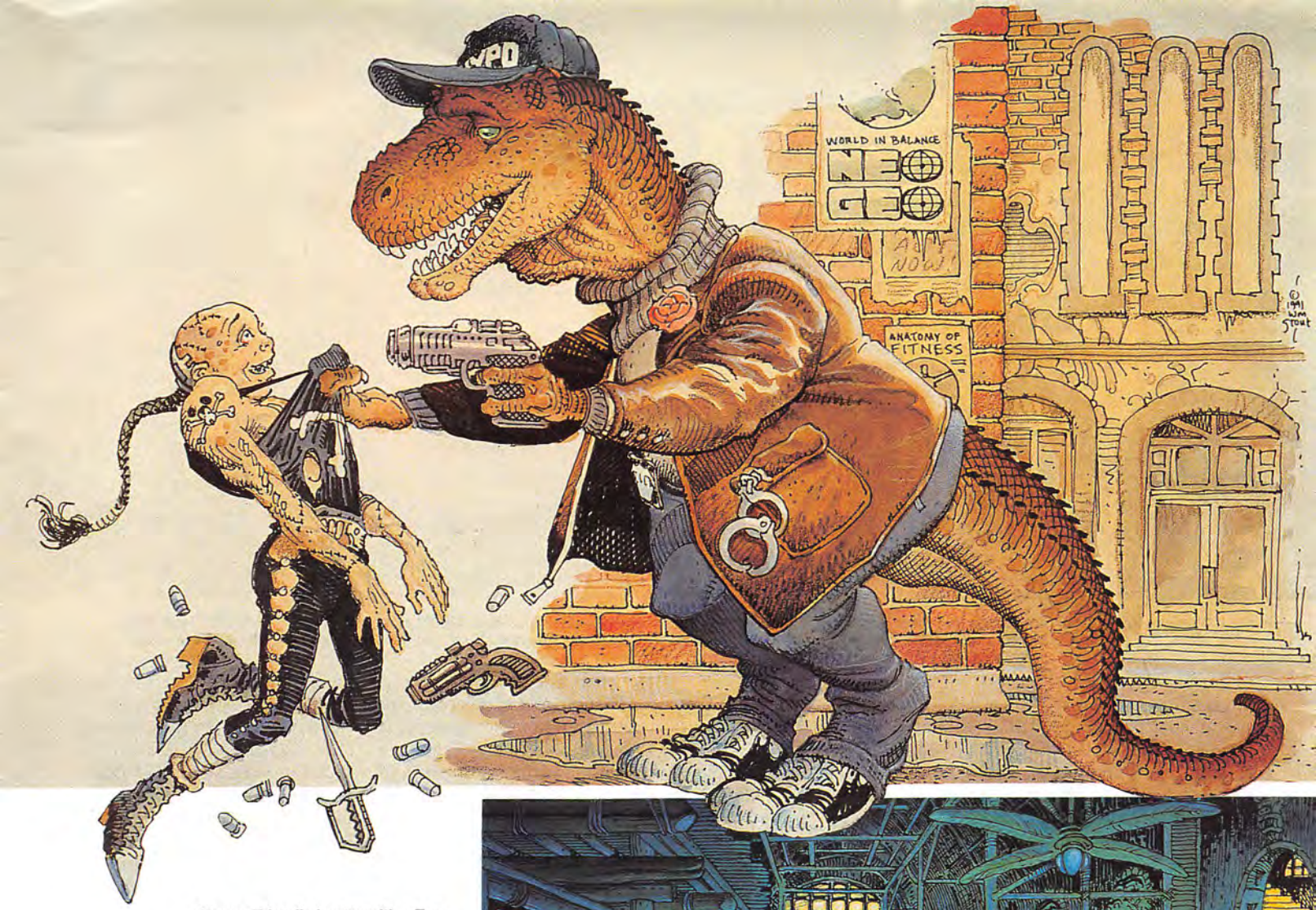
Nonetheless, Stout spoke about his experiences in creating a whole cavalcade of cuddly T-Rex' and truly toothsome dino-villains. Whether or not the film, about a stalwart T-Rex clone's attempt to unmask the killer of a "Scale" (as future dinos are called), would have made a hit with its odd brand of "rites-of-passage" whimsy and hardboiled sleuthing remains to be seen. What is evident is that NewLine is taking no chances on letting the film take a plunge into a fiscal tar-pit. The movie, starring Whoopi Goldberg as Theodore's cop partner and Armin Mueller-Stahl as the baddie intent on using his cloning methods for greater plans of domination, has been fraught with rumors involving Whoopi's alleged disdain for the project.

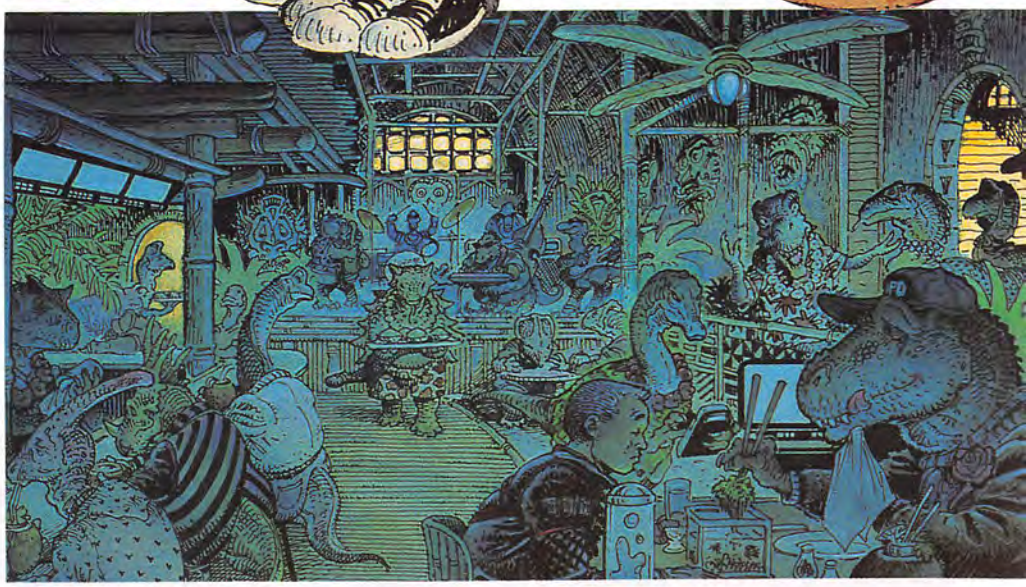
Said Stout, who was suggested to Betuel by veteran production designer Ron Cobb. "I was contacted by Betuel and Rich Abrahamson in November or December '91. They needed some dinosaur drawings and I wound up doing roughly 70 drawings in between December 1991 and June 1992." Stout found working with fellow "dino-enthusiast," Betuel, a joy.

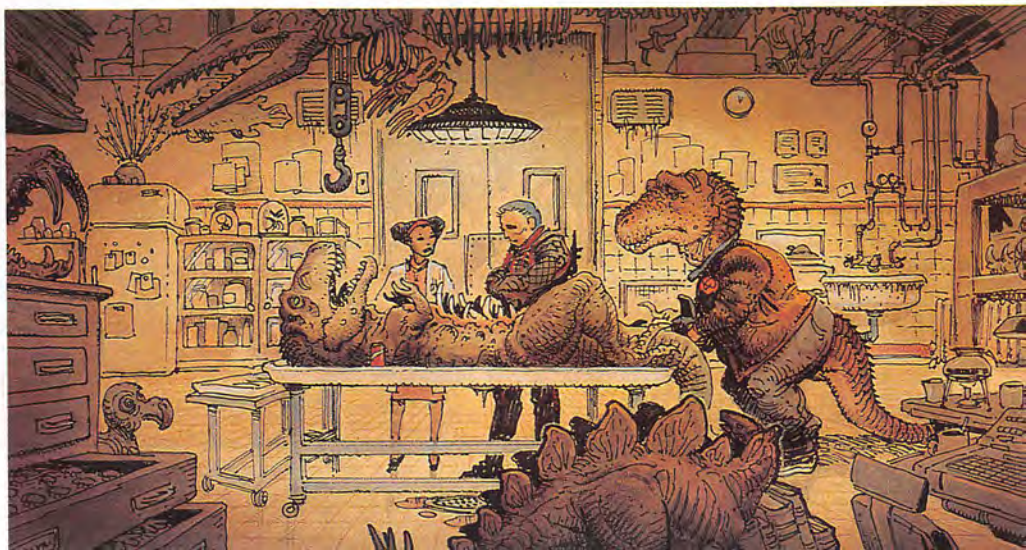
The challenge was in designing a pair of genetically altered T-Rex', the eponymous Theodore and his mate, Molly, while not losing their prehistoric ferocity. Working with the film's general futuro-fable context, in which genetically cloned dinosaurs live side-by-side with humanity, the artist found himself with a high degree of creative leeway that allowed him to surmount both problems.

"We had a little play in terms of the material," said Stout. "Instead of having the actual creatures of 60,000,000 years ago, they were genetically altered to fit into human society. For example, I was able to make the T-Rex' arms longer. When I was designing Teddy, I had to come up with a design that could be functional and could have a man inside when it got to the suit stage. I had to anthropomorphize the dinosaur's face, it had to have a full range of movement. With Molly, Teddy's mate, I had to design a T-Rex that was feminine and sweet. The dinosaurs in THEODORE REX are all very sympathetic and sweet, but there are definitely some very dark ones as well."

While visualizing his design concepts, Stout found himself grappling with a very daunting question: what would a genetically engineered Tyrannosaurus Rex wear, in order to blend in with the bulk of humankind. Stout wound up choosing to draw Teddy in "very humanlike clothes. I put him in lots of jackets and turtlenecks, and pants and things." Stout's conceptual art for the film also neatly encapsulates the movie's truly eclectic blend of Stone Age meets '40s retro and futuristic hi-tech. The artist's drawings of a '40s style Protoceratops chanteuse and sassy waitress at the "Trilo-Bite Diner" are certainly in keeping with the film's 'noir trappings while sketches of The Steel Samurai and Dinosaurology Lab are definite nods to the movie's sci-fi trappings. The latter sketch, a cue to a scene where the autopsy of a murdered T-Rex is performed is indicative of Stout's extensive knowledge of actual





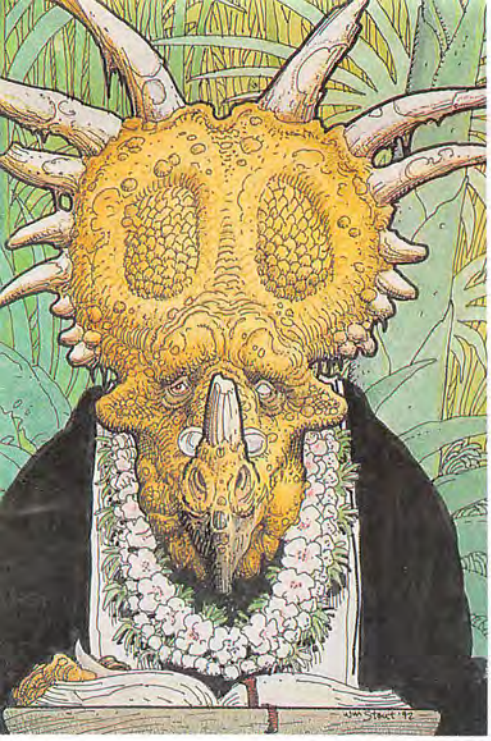


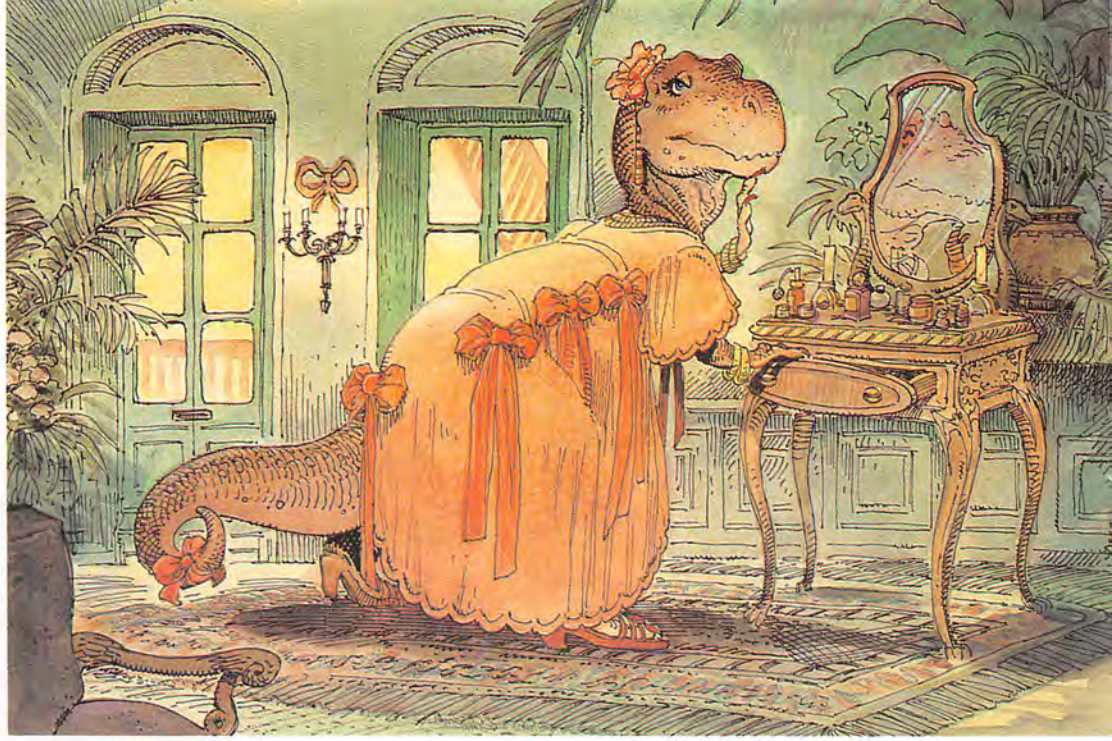
Above: Friendly banter with a Zap-head, Stout's early rendering of Teddy in 1992. Right: Stout's design for the Trilo-Bite Diner, where the dinosaur elite meet to eat. Bottom: Stout's Dinosaurology Lab, for the autopsy of a murdered Tyranosaur.

paleontology "bone labs" and research on mortuaries during his stint on RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD.

Stout's 1977 one-man L.A. show, "The Prehistoric World of William Stout" may have been one of the first indications of a burgeoning love for the saurian smart set, but the artist recalls two early cinematic influences that would leave a lifelong desire to flourish a brush with elan for The Jurassic Clan. Stout's parents took their child to a '50s revival of the 1933 classic KING KONG, and later, after a similar outing to see Disney's FANTASIA, Stout was hooked on bringing the Thunder Lizards to vivid aesthetic life.

In his 28-year career in the industry, Stout's accrued credits as production designer (his work on 1984's RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD in fact makes him the youngest production designer in film history) and conceptual artist with genre films such as PREDATOR ('85), both CONAN movies ('80,'83), INVADERS FROM MARS ('85) and THE HITCHER ('85). The Chouinard Art Institute graduate has, in between film assignments, inked a variety





Dinosaur Priest (left), Stout's Styracosaurus holy man, sculpted by Thomas Dickens for the film. Right: Stout's design for Teddy's girlfriend, Molly Rex. THEODORE REX was directed by Jonathan Betuel for New Line Cinema, which scrapped a planned theatrical release to open the film direct-to-video.

of books reflecting his interest in visual paleontological reconstruction such as the 1981 Bantam release, *THE DINOSAURS: A Fantastic New View of a Lost Era* and Ray Bradbury's *Dinosaur Tales*, produced exhibitions including a travelling exhibition, "Dinosaurs Past and Present," and a 45 painting, one-man show, "Dinosaurs, Penguins and Whales—The Wildlife of Antarctica." Not surprisingly, best-selling author and sometime director Michael Crichton acknowledges the artist's work as a major inspiration for *Jurassic Park*.

Stout, a member of The Society for Vertebrate Paleontology for the last 15 years, remarked on his particular field of interest. "It is fascinating that paleontology is a young science, it really hasn't hit a dead end yet. The Society of Vertebrate Paleontology, which I belong to, meets every year to keep up on their findings. The last meeting I attended, we discovered this claw that belonged to this giant ostrich. The public generally finds out new info regarding dinosaurs about two years after the fact."

That interest in paleontology resulted in Stout being selected to participate in the travelling exhibition "Dinosaurs Past and Present" (1986-91). The group show (including eleven Stout paintings) depicted the history of paleontological reconstruction. The exhibition is famous for having broken all attendance records at each of its host museums. The six year tour included (among others) the British Museum, the Royal Ontario Museum, and the American Museum of Natural History. At the Smithsonian alone, over two million visitors saw the show.

In addition to this exhibit (the eleven paintings can be found in Stout's book, *THE DINOSAURS*), the artist's recent output has included the April 1993 release of the "William Stout's Lost Worlds" trading card set by Comic Images, designing the prime time animated series of JURASSIC PARK and the commissioning in 1994 of two large murals for The Houston Museum of Natural Science. The murals depict "Life Before The Dinosaurs"

Stout's early design for the villain, Edge, as the ultimate Christian instrument of vengeance.

The Steel Samurai, a master of all weapons, given a physical high-tech flourish by Stout.

The Mandarin, Stout's design concept for the mastermind of technology of Betuel's script.

and debuted to the public on May 15, 1994. A former Disney conceptualist, designer, producer and planner for EuroDisneyland, Disneyland, Tokyo-Disneyland and Walt Disney World, Stout has continued to do theme park attraction creation and design for MCA/Universal.

A film veteran since his work on the 1978 movie, BUCK ROGERS IN THE 25TH CENTURY, the designer's recent work includes a series of paintings for an Arnold Schwarzeneggar remake of CAPTAIN BLOOD, which is, incidentally, his 25th feature film, and 5th film project with Schwarzeneggar (the two CONAN movies, PREDATOR, RED SONJA, being the others).

Keeping with his recent filmic chores, Stout's latest design assignment is sure to appeal to dino-fans everywhere. Within a year of his final involvement with THEODORE REX, Stout participated in yet another "Dinosaurs-and-Technology" visual project. The designer was chosen by Comic Images to design all the Saurian Warriors for their collectible card game, "Star Quest." Stout wound up executing a total of 24 cards, typifying the game's high and low warfare technology exhibiting a tongue-in-cheek approach to the Sgt. Fury/Primal Rage that shows Stout's combination of humor and knowledge of real dinosaur anatomy to good effect.

On his work on THEODORE REX, and with director Betuel, Stout offered nothing but praise: "One of the nice things about working with Jonathan is that as a writer, he utilizes any input. When I offered him suggestions, he listened, and I really like that kind of creative participation in filmmaking. The script was constantly evolving on the project, and I tried to give the film a bit of a harder edge. It was sometimes in danger of being too sweet, and I think that hardness, or darkness, is what's great about the best fairy tales. If you go back to the original Grimm's fairy tales, you find that they were really quite gruesome. Jonathan is a wonderful storyteller, so hopefully he'll come up with a winner." □

THEODORE REX

Bland dino-mystery is too bad to enjoy, too good to be infamous.

New Line Cinema presents in association with J&M Entertainment a Shooting Star Entertainment production. 5/96, 92 mins, PG. Written and Directed by Jonathan Betuel. Produced by Richard Abramson, Sue Baden-Powell. Executive Producer, Stefano Ferraro Co. Executive Producer, Jonathan Betuel. Director of Photography, David Tattersall, B.S.C. Edited by Rick Shaine, Steve Mirkovich, A.C.E. Music Composed and Conducted by Robert Folk. Production Designer, Walter Martishius. Dinosaurs by Criswell Productions. Dinosaur Movement Coordinator, Pons Maar. Visual Effects Supervisor, Robert Habros.

Katie Coltrane:.....Whoopi Goldberg
Elizar Kane:.....Armin Mueller-Stahl
Dr. Shade:.....Juliet Landau
Spinner:.....Bud Cort
Edge:.....Stephen McHattie
Voice of Theodore Rex:.....George Newbern
Voice of Molly Rex:.....Carol Kane

by Dan Persons

Whoopi Goldberg as detective Katie Coltrane in a dinosaur crowd scene. Right: Stout's Coltraine Zarovich, when Betuel wanted to cast Val Kilmer.

I half-suspect there would have been some hope for THEODORE REX if only it had been a worse film. After all, truly hideous cinema attains a fame of sorts: it's passionately deconstructed in the press, referenced in Jay Leno monologues, and—the pinnacle—enshrined forever on someone's Golden Turkeys list. Yes, the unabashedly wretched gathers its own avid—albeit somewhat morbid—following, while anything less wins only our brief pity before vanishing forever to the far reaches of the video rental shelves.

There's nothing truly horrendous about THEODORE REX. Then again, there's nothing especially memorable about it, either. If you're wondering what it takes for a studio to sink some $36 million into a film, cast a major box-office draw, and then decide the whole mess doesn't deserve a theatrical release, you have your answer here. A sort of WHO FRAMED THE ALIEN NATION'S MASKED BLADE RUNNER?, the movie trips lightly through the scenarios of some of the most popular genre films of the last ten years, picking up a stylistic fillip here, a set-piece there, and putting it all together with a distinct lack of finesse, wit, or innovation.

Forget plot; the entire—and admittedly threadbare—mystery is given away during an opening crawl tacked onto the film's first thirty seconds. That leaves REX has no recourse but to rely upon character development and engaging ambiance for whatever appeal it can muster. Unfortunately, in the former category, we're given a massive, lumbering, not-terribly-convincing dinosaur puppet (whose lip movements only occasionally synch with its dubbed voice) and an admittedly talented comic actress who—trooper that she is—still can't avoid investing her role with all the passion of someone fulfilling a contractual obligation (which she actually was). As far as atmosphere, director Jonathan Betuel tries to get something going, orchestrating MASK-like swooping camera-moves and BLADE RUNNER-style neon-washed streets, but he's not really up to the challenge.

Not up to it, hell. He doesn't even get close. A night-club scene in which Teddy and Coltrane meet up with the victim's femme-fatale chanteuse of a wife, Molly—a scene clearly meant to replicate the Ink-and-Paint Club set-piece from ROGER RABBIT—gets botched because Criswell Productions' lumbering foam-rubber Molly isn't Richard William's hyper-Averyan Jessica Rabbit, and any potential for sexuality is overridden by the unmitigated ineptness of the sequence's realization.

It goes on like that throughout the film: the attempt at cyberpunk futurism that stuffs Whoopi Goldberg into a black leather uniform that makes her look like a well-packed salami; the way the allegedly ingratiating Teddy keeps stepping on everyone else's lines, eventually making you wish somebody would slap the fawning reptile, good 'n' hard; the steadfast refusal to let any of this make any sort of sense

What you take away from THEODORE REX is an understanding of what happens when an attempt to build a totally generic entertainment goes horribly, horribly wrong.

When it goes right, of course, you get BATMAN FOREVER. □

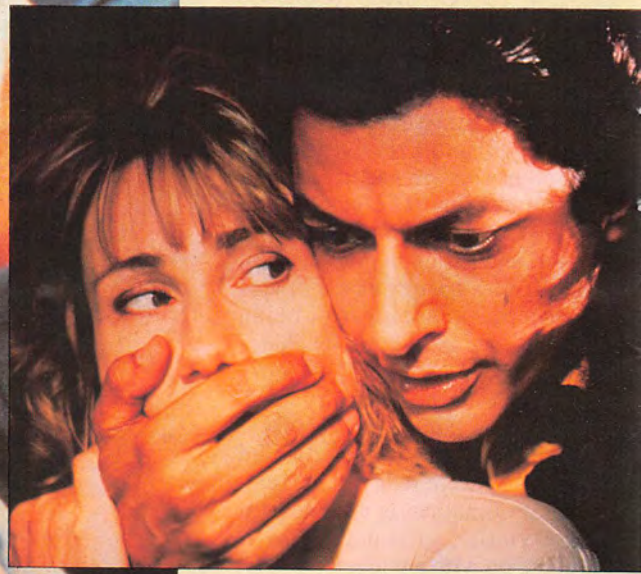
VIS

HORROR'S

When these

Throughout human history mental aberrations have held a peculiar fascination for even the healthiest minds. Altered states of consciousness, particularly those which break away from consensual reality, both define and challenge our assumptions about what is normal. The "abnormal," those who see the world in drastically different ways, or who see a world which the rest of us cannot perceive, have traditionally been the objects of fear or, in some cases, awe and esteem. Whether their visions have been interpreted as good or evil, sickness or state of grace, has depended largely upon the prevailing belief systems of the societies in which they lived; what they have had in

After monsters, madmen are the horror genre's bread and butter, especially if, like Greek oracles, they are fonts of esoteric and obscure knowledge. The most famous example is Hannibal Lecter, who offers vague clues while manipulating and testing others' interpretative powers. Another good example is Jeff Goldblum's title turn in MR. FROST, an incarcerated serial killer who claims to his psychiatrist, Kathy Baker, that he is the Devil.



IONARY MADMEN

GUIDES TO THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY

oracles of evil talk, audiences should listen.

common is their "otherness," their status as creatures set apart from the rest of humanity.

The Delphic oracle spoke through the bodies of chosen mortals who, by contemporary definitions, would be considered schizophrenic. The lives of the Saints are catalogues of what psychiatrists now call psychotic episodes. Joan of Arc believed that she was in direct communication with God, as did 19th century Canadian revolutionary Louis Riel; both were eventually tried and executed, although today's courts would unquestionably judge them to be both legally insane. All these individuals were widely believed to be sacred leaders and commanded large followings, altering forever the destinies of their nations. Even today they are revered by those who take their visions as evidence of a special knowledge of things real but unseen.

Historically, not only gods, but also demons and devils, have whispered in the ears of an unfortunate, chosen few. In Europe, thousands of men and women were accused of witchcraft on the basis of "spectral evidence," the complaint of accusers who had "seen" or "felt" the witches' astral presences; similar evidence was produced at the famous Salem witch trials. More recently, "Son of Sam" killer David Berkowitz claimed to have committed his murders under instructions from Satan himself. While many people still believe in saints, only a very few are still inclined to give credence to claims that demons influence human behavior. Even those religious institutions which believe in personified, active evil are reluctant to attribute human immorality to supernatural forces, and a visit from the devil will more likely result in a referral to a doctor than to an exorcist.

It may be that today's "demons" come not from hell but from the stars. Accounts of alien abduction are growing more numerous every year, and many prominent psychologists have noted close parallels between abductees' experiences and those of the medieval victims of incubi, succubi, and witches. No one can prove conclusively that these experiences are not "real." Whether they are evidence of delusions or some sort of true paranormal phenomena, their prevalence among apparently sane members of society is, in any case, disquieting, and the reports have certainly captured the public imagination. Dozens of films and television programs (CLOSE ENCOUNTERS, COMMUNION, FIRE IN THE SKY, even NOVA) have speculated as to the meanings of these alien visitations, and abductees often claim to have been given special prophetic messages regarding the fate of the environment and of humanity. Like THE X-FILES' agent Muldur, many people regard these messages to be genuine and the abductees to be "chosen" for an, as yet, unrevealed purpose.

As rational and scientific as we think ourselves to be, we may not be all that different from the pilgrims who journeyed to Delphi. The provable "reality" of prophetic reports does not seem to be as important to us as the "otherly" quality of the experiences themselves. We look into insane or visionary or hallucinatory experiences as into a mirror, which reflects back for us an image of what we are or what we may, for good or ill, have the potential to become. Altered states are often believed to hold the key to hidden truths, a theme which has been developed in countless films almost since the inception of motion pictures. Baron Frankenstein and Dr. Moreau, the archetypal mad scientists, possess the secrets of life and death. In SEVEN, John Doe has an alternate vision of morality, one which, in an earlier time, might have passed for the norm. Sometimes the revelations are gentler, as in RAIN MAN, or more metaphysical, as in EQUUS. Sometimes visions of alternate or parallel realities are so seductive that others find them more attractive than their own. In LILITH, psychiatric orderly Warren Beatty is drawn into the fantastic world of one of his patients, ultimately losing touch with his own reality and becoming a patient himself.

The threat of psychological "infection" with the delusions of others is also evident in films like SEVEN, MANHUNTER, and THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS, in which police investigators must attempt to gain insight into the minds of serial killers. The most infectious madness of all is no doubt that of the famous Mr. Kurtz, whose unspeakable visions test the sanity of the protagonists of both Conrad's original novel, *Heart of Darkness*, and Francis Coppola's 1979 filmic retelling of the story, APOCALYPSE NOW.

Like Kurtz, the unwary may find that flirtations with the unknown have dire consequences for their mental health. The theme of unanticipated or unwanted discoveries arising from acts of excessive curiosity and leading to madness is a staple of the horror genre, in films from THE MAN WITH THE X-RAY EYES to FROM BEYOND. It is a short step from the assumption that forbidden knowledge causes madness to the notion that madness may be a symptom of a special kind of knowledge. A number of recent films have played with the concept of the insane—particularly the criminally insane—as modern day oracles, whose forbidden knowledge may lead us to a closer understanding of the moral and ethical mysteries of our present day. While, in real life, thousands flock to their televisions to peer into the faces of madness presented on documentary crime shows, genre cinema has given us a host of investigators who, having exhausted all rational resources, make their pilgrimages to maximum security prisons and mental institutions in search of answers to their fundamental questions about good and evil. Like all mythic pilgrimages, these journeys into the irrational and often chaotic world of madness are fraught with perils, which must be resisted and overcome if the seeker of knowledge is to achieve his or her goal.

Jodie Foster's Clarisse Starling, the FBI agent who investigates the serial killings in THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS, is the archetypal pilgrim setting out on a clearly defined and limited quest for information. Driven by what seem to be rational and specific goals of her own, she approaches convicted killer Hannibal Lecter (Anthony Hopkins) believing she's in

BY PATRICIA MOIR

control. Under Lecter's bizarre and manipulative tutelage, she finds herself confronting the truth not only about the murderer she hopes to capture but about her own psyche as well. As oracle, Lecter has all the charismatic power which we associate with evil, supernatural characters. Despite the most careful and rational restrictions on his movements, he cannot be controlled or contained. His insight into the hidden corners of the minds of Clarisse and others allows him to play the sorts of games that were so typical of the ancient Greek oracles, offering ambiguous clues and red herrings and testing others' powers of interpretation, while ultimately furthering his own ends. Like the gods of Olympus, Lecter has little regard for the desires of those he perceives to be his inferiors, and their advances and missteps are viewed with amusement and disdain. Mortals rarely fared well in their dealings with the Olympians, and Clarisse and company suffer a variety of unpleasant fates, ranging from mental distress to death, escaping only when Lecter's whims so dictate.

Does Hannibal Lecter have some special knowledge of good and evil, or is he simply a clever manipulator? (He is, after all, supposed to be a brilliant psychiatrist.) He is portrayed as an almost non-human character throughout the film; we see him caged and restrained like a wild animal, and his doctor makes a point of informing Clarisse that Lecter experiences none of the normal human responses to violence and suffering. Despite these non-human attributes, however, Lecter is the ultimate aesthete, savoring the finest that human culture has to offer with the appreciation of the true connoisseur. He is something of an artist himself, not only as a painter but also, from the accounts we are given, in the execution of his crimes, and there is a perverse sense of justice in his choice of victims. There is also the nature of his crimes to be considered; as a ritual practice, cannibalism represents a means of increasing one's power by ingesting the strength of one's enemies or sacrificial victims. Lecter sees himself as superhuman, above standard codes of morality. His operations beyond all acceptable human norms suggest that he does, in fact, possess a knowledge of things which few would ever glimpse and, for that matter, which most would heartily wish to avoid. To Clarisse falls the role of reluctant Cassandra; like the tragic Greek seer, she finds her intuitions into Lecter's character go largely ignored or misinterpreted by others until his ultimate purposes are finally revealed.

Overall, madmen in film have been given a cautious respect. We are drawn to those whose knowledge offers a different way of interpreting the world.

12 MONKEYS, the most recent variation on the theme, offers no less than two oracles of alternate reality: Bruce Willis as Cole and Brad Pitt as Jeffrey Goines.

Clarisse Starling's confessions and Hannibal Lecter's insights create a strange, almost telepathic bond between the two. Clarisse is eventually able to divine his motives, and he is able to reveal secrets she has kept hidden even from herself. This identification of the "pilgrim-student" with his/her "oracle" is an oft-repeated motif in other, thematically similar films; it seems that "otherly" experience cannot simply be transmitted by description but must be lived to be valid. The protagonist of MANHUNTER is renowned for his uncanny ability to "put himself into the killer's mind." In WHEN THE BOUGH BREAKS, a derivative but nevertheless interesting LAMBS clone, there are two levels of identification. The psychologist-investigator, played by Ally Walker, feels herself linked to her young patient, Jordan, by virtue of their shared experiences of childhood abuse, while Jordan is able to "see" through the eyes of his estranged sister, Jennifer, who is being held captive by an unknown abductor. (Dramatically, the identification of the siblings is emphasized by the use of the same actor in both roles—a truly remarkable performance on the part of Tara Subkoff).

In EXORCIST III, Lt. Kinderman (the homicide detective from THE EXORCIST, played here by George C. Scott) shares an unusual bond with a hospitalized psychotic. The spirit of the "Zodiac" serial murderer has taken possession of the body of Kinderman's friend, Father Damien Karras, who has been presumed dead. The film revolves around a series of conversations between the detective and Karras/Zodiac, with Kinderman acting the part of religious pilgrim in his search for both a killer-at-large and the answers to his most pressing spiritual questions about the nature and purpose of evil. Although Kinderman is identified with Karras (they were close friends; they shared similar crises of faith), it is the identification, in this case an actual physical one, of Karras and the Zodiac killer which takes center stage. The priest, as a servant of Christ, and the killer, who serves a darker (but, in origin, equally Christian) master, are brought together in a graphic affirmation of Kinderman's suspicion that good and evil are not, in fact, separate forces at all. (This metaphysical theme is handled in much greater and more satisfying depth in William Peter Blatty's novel *Legion*, but it is still in evidence in the film's imagery.) Whereas WHEN THE BOUGH BREAKS places one actor in two parts, EXORCIST III achieves the same effect by having two actors play one entity, with Jason Miller reprising his role as Father Karras and Brad Dourif taking over for Zodiac. (It's worth noting here that Dourif, perhaps more than any other actor, has been closely associated with the character of the visionary psychotic. From his earliest role in WISE BLOOD, in which he played a Southern religious fanatic, to his appearance on THE X-FILES as a death-row inmate with psychic abilities, he has pretty well defined the type of madman who suffers the curse of forbidden knowledge.) Like Lecter, the Zodiac character has clearly super-human qualities; he is also an aesthete and a philosopher, and he has the supernatural ability to see into and influence the minds and actions of others.

In MR.FROST, Jeff Goldblum plays a serial murderer who claims to be the devil. Once again, atrocities and aesthetics go hand-in-hand. Mr. Frost videotapes his crimes, and he is also a gourmet cook, although he does not stoop to the lowly human activity of eating, preferring instead to simply photograph his culinary creations before consigning them to the wastebin. His supernatural claims are disregarded by all but the arresting officer played by Alan Bates (it is interesting to note that those who are first to recognize the wisdom of these madmen are already set

In EXORCIST III, Lt. Kinderman (George C. Scott) seeks answers from Father Damien Karras (Jason Miller), now incarcerated as a lunatic possessed by a demon.

apart from their fellows by the extremes of their own psychologically damaging experiences, in this case the death of the policeman's wife), and Frost is imprisoned in an asylum. There, psychiatrist Dr. Day (Kathy Baker), whose name suggests the "light" of scientific reason, finds a strange rapport with her patient, who threatens to awaken her awareness of the irrational side of her own nature. Frost offers the promise of a forbidden knowledge which has been discredited and forgotten by the modern world, and it is his intention to reinstate that knowledge by converting Day, the quintessential rationalist, to a true faith in his powers. Day's identification with Frost, her alter ego, is suggested in the film's recurring images of mirrors: she observes Frost through a two-way glass which superimposes own reflection on the image of her patient; she has dreams of Frost smashing her head into and through a mirrored wall, and Frost tells her, "Soon you'll be on my side of the mirror." Like Alice, she is drawn to the inverted world of Frost' s looking glass, ultimately succumbing to the lure of a power against which her intellect has no defense. Her questions are eventually answered, but the answers are not the ones she expected or desired.

Frost is able telepathically to influence the other inmates in the asylum, whose altered consciousnesses presumably place them closer to the kind of knowledge he possesses. In a reversal of the South American film MAN FACING SOUTHEAST, in which a Christ-like alien is imprisoned in a hospital and awakens in the other patients a sense of joyful hope, MR.FROST gives us an anti-Christ capable of driving his "disciples" to acts of profound despair. Like Clarisse Starling and Lt. Kinderman, Dr. Day is forced to recognize that good and evil, light and dark, cannot be separated. As Mr. Frost says, in words that echo those of EXORCIST III's Zodiac, "We've often seen good come from evil, and evil from good. I move in mysterious ways."

The most recent addition to this thematic category is Terry Gilliam's 12 MONKEYS (1995), the tale of a potentially visionary possible time traveller (Bruce Willis) who seeks the lost knowledge of the past in order to improve the future. His prophetic quest lands him in a psychiatric ward, where he discovers an apparent link between his own fate and that of a charismatic madman (Brad Pitt). As an emissary from the future, he is both a seeker and a possessor of answers; whether or not his time-travelling is a delusion, he still seems to have a supernatural knowledge of his own fate and those who are connected with it, especially that of his doctor (Madeleine Stowe), who, like Dr. Day, is converted to faith in his visions. 12 MONKEYS is a disturbingly ambiguous film; while Starling, Kinderman, and Day conduct their investigations in clinical surroundings and are slowly drawn toward awareness, Gilliam plunges his characters into multiple worlds of such nightmarish aspect that we cannot be sure whether they are approaching the truth or simply descending into a deeper madness. Although 12 MONKEYS is altogether a darker film, it has, at least in its ambiguity, more in common with THEY MIGHT BE GIANTS, in which psychiatrist Dr. Watson is propelled into a series of weird adventures in the company of a patient who believes himself to be Sherlock Holmes.

Overall, from DRACULA's Renfield to THE X-FILES' Duane Barry, madmen have been regarded with a cautious respect which they are rarely given in real life. Perhaps modern viewers, like the pilgrim-seekers in these films, fear that the rational defenses which we have erected against the mysteries of our universe are less than wholly convincing. Seeking answers which science refuses to provide, we are drawn to those whose unique knowledge seems to offer, if not in reality, then at least by way of analogy, a different way of interpreting our world. Given that our fascination with prophecy and paranormal experience hasn't significantly abated in several thousand years, it is unlikely that we will cease to seek further insight through vicarious identification with the visionaries and/or madmen who know "the undiscovered country" firsthand. □

GHOST IN THE SHELL

This action-packed cyberpunk thriller is the most ambitious anime since AKIRA.

With JOHNNY MNEMONIC choking on its own brew of cynicism and stupidity, and everything from STRANGE DAYS to innumerable ROBOCOP sequels and ripoffs, cyberpunk is proving an aesthetic easier to admire than duplicate. It had appeared that the decade-old mix of high-tech irony and back-alley realism, originally coined by author William Gibson, had died an ignoble, cinematic death. But if so, no one bothered to tell the producers of GHOST IN THE SHELL.

Applying equal doses of artistic skill and textual sophistication, the creators of such landmark Japanese anime projects as AKIRA and PATLABOR have proven that abundant life still dwells in those grotty, near-future back-alleys. More intimate in scale than the apocalyptic AKIRA, with an ineffable beauty that cleanly complements its wall-to-wall action, GHOST IN THE SHELL carries the genre to a more sophisticated and gratifyingly thoughtful realm. The results may be the best thing to happen to SF filmmaking in years; after a decade of indifferent treatment, cyberpunk has at last found its soul on the animation table.

While numerous western-based anime distributors have been talking-up the potential of co-production deals with their Japanese counterparts, Manga Entertainment has become the first company to actually see the process through. Joining forces with producer Kodansha Ltd. and toy manufacturer Bandai, the Western distributor had no trouble throwing its support behind GHOST IN THE SHELL, an adaptation of the popular manga by Masamune Shirow. "The appeal," explained Marvin Gleicher, American-based CEO of Manga, "was that the storyline was more universal; it appealed more to a Western culture intellect than most [anime] feature films prior to that. I think that in the films of the '80s and early '90s there was a lot of Eastern culture that translated to a certain aspect of society, but didn't allow the film to reach its broader potential. GHOST IN THE SHELL, to me, is an intelligent, animated BLADE RUNNER; it has more appeal in that regard."

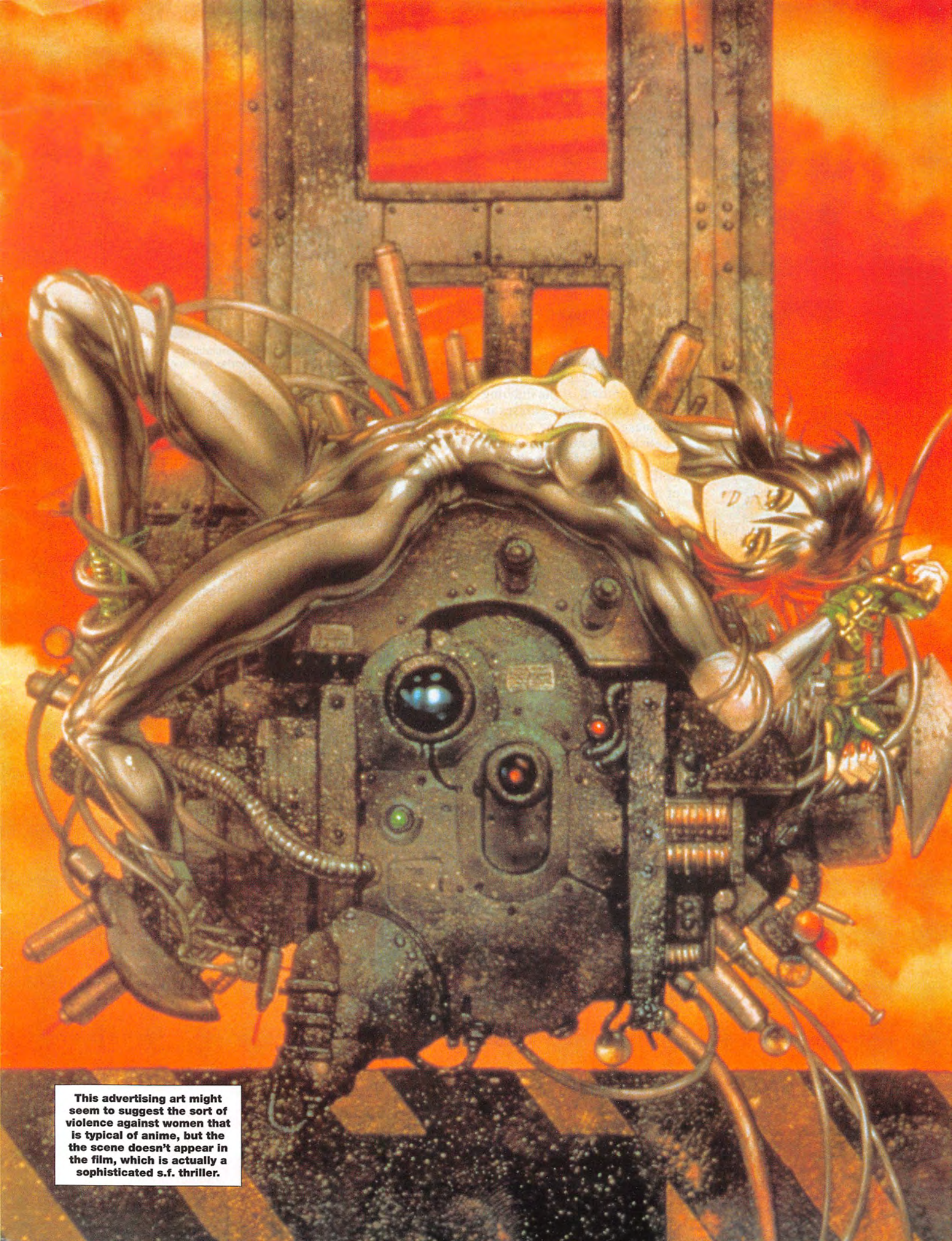
The crew behind GHOST IN THE SHELL: Front (l to r), Kumiko Yusa, color setter; Mamoru Oshii, director; Hiromasa Ogura, art director. Back (l to r), Hiroyuki Okiura, character design; Toshihiko Nishikubo, animation director; Atsushi Takeuchi, mechanical design; Mitsuhisa Ishikawa, producer.

"It was a very intelligent look at artificial intelligence," added Laurence Guinness, the film's London based associate producer (as well as Manga's director of production, acquisition, and development), "and a bold vision of the future potential of computers. It was the first time I'd read something that was stimulating in that area. I thought the concepts contained in the plot were interesting and very valid."

Directed by Mamoru Oshii (the PATLABOR series) and produced at Production I.G., GHOST started life with a series of communications that attempted to focus the production in a way that would resonate with audiences well beyond the borders of Japan. "When the script was finally written," Guinness explained, "I wrote a 25 page script appraisal which contained, as you would expect from twenty-odd pages, a lot of suggestions and comments. This was discussed at length, over many days, with the director. As a result of that, there were significant contributions on our part to the overall story."

Exactly how those contributions fine-tuned the storyline for a worldwide market, however, Guinness was reluctant to say. "Suffice to say it changed in small but significant ways so that everybody was happy," he said. "We placed a lot of trust and faith in our Japanese partners. Obviously, since we're based in London, there were physical limitations on how

By Dan Persons



This advertising art might seem to suggest the sort of violence against women that is typical of anime, but the the scene doesn't appear in the film, which is actually a sophisticated s.f. thriller.

A few months before GHOST IN THE SHELL, Mamoru Oshii's previous effort, PATLABOR 2, screened in L.A.

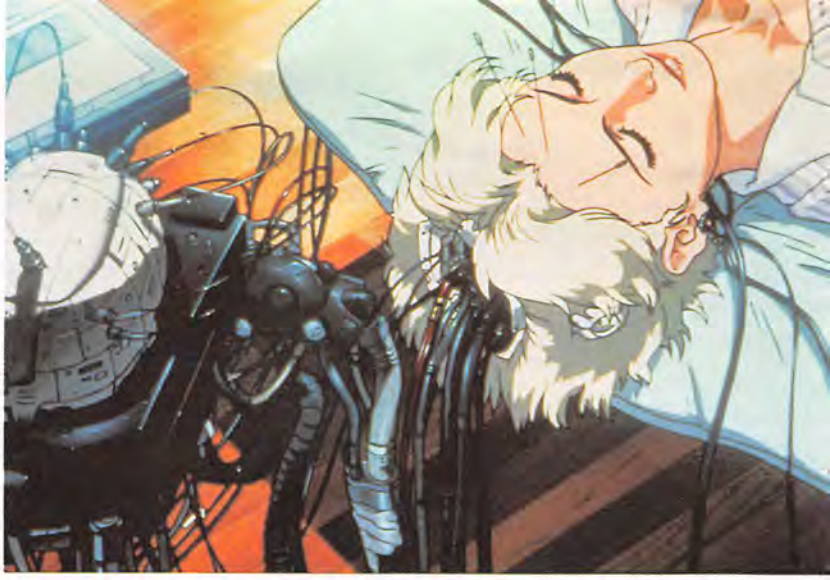
PATLABOR II: MOBILE POLICE FORCE

Director: Mamoru Oshii. Manga Entertainment, 3/96. 108 mins. Voices: David Jarvis, Briony Glassco, Sharon Holm

Welcome back to the future, where Labors, giant human-driven robots, perform humankind's grunt work, and Patlabors (i.e., Patrol Labors) are the police force that keep the other guys in line. If the playing field's the same, however, the stakes have been raised. Where PATLABOR 1 tried to involve audiences with a threat to Earth's labor force—caused by a rather implausible conjunction of computer virus and imminent typhoon—Part 2 hews to a more human and involving scenario, positing a Japan under seige by those who wish to see the nation return to more militaristic traditions.

There's less of the look of TV animation in this outing, and precious few instances where director Oshii resorts to the comic characterizations. The more reality-grounded production approach clearly points the way to what the director would achieve with GHOST IN THE SHELL. The major set-pieces (a montage of the everyday life around the heavily-armored police forces protecting Tokyo, and the subsequent coup and terrorism campaign), demonstrate a depth nowhere present in the prior effort. More accomplished, both technically and stylistically, the film represents a quantum leap for Oshii.

Still, a bit more consistency in the story department would have been appreciated. The film seems headed toward a low-key confrontation between police chief Nagumo and her former lover, the military genius who has orchestrted the terror seige—but it can't get there without the obligatory cyborg clash. Oshii would eventually work out a more satisfying equation for intertwining drama and action with GHOST IN THE SHELL. But as it stands, PATLABOR 2 is an entertaining blend of human consequence and mecha-fueled science-fiction. Like its protagonists, the series has matured in significant ways, and the results are a pleasure to behold. ● ● **Dan Persons**



A "ghost-hacked human" is treated after her personality—i.e., her ghost—has been altered by the implantation of false memories by the elusive Puppetmaster.

much we could influence the actual production management of the project. We had storyboard approval; we were involved in all the processes up to production, but the actual, physical production was managed by our partners at Production I.G."

"We did offer suggestions and made a few changes on the original script and dialogue," Gleicher elaborated, "but to that extent, once all the opinions of all the partners were presented, the director did what he was going to do. Laurence ran into certain problems with the Japanese-required approval of the dubbing and the script. Some phrases in Japanese require one word in English or are not translatable, and vice-versa. As complicated as the plot was, there was a bit of back and forth between the parties, but it worked out."

Whatever the philosophical issues, director Oshii was permitted to go his own way with the actual production of the film. Work started in June, 1994 with the film taking one full year to animate. The results, according to Guinness couldn't have been more salutary: "For the physical elements of the production, we gave a lot of freedom to the team that was doing it. We trusted and respected their experience—there was nothing we could have added to their side. I think you'll agree by looking at the film, the way it looks, there's very little we could have added to enhance that. Some of the most talented animators on the planet are responsible for putting this film together. We were kept informed of all the processes, the schedules. What attracted us to the film was the story, the way in which it was told, and the concepts behind the film. There was a lot of discussion surrounding that. The film stays very true to the vision of the director, which was inspired by the writing.

"What we particularly like about the film, and what's very unusual in terms of comparing it to a Hollywood-style film, is the pacing—the moment when you are given time to reflect on the concept, given time to consider and given space within the film to think about its concepts, whether or not you understand them. I think what the film is very successful in doing is provoking thoughts surrounding those concepts. Now, whether or not it's the place of entertainment to stimulate those kinds of thoughts and allow room for those thoughts is a whole different topic for discussion."

Major Motoko Kusanagi's cybernetic body undergoes a rejuvenation process—one might almost call it a "tune-up"—after completing a hazardous mission.

Audiences so far have shown no reluctance in embracing GHOST's combination of visceral thrills and intellectual stimulation. Distributed on a market-by-market basis, mostly to art-houses (a plan for a simultaneous, worldwide release was scotched when the Japanese distributors proved reluctant to wait for the completion of the English dub), the film has garnered praise from no less an influential source than action master James Cameron , who is prominently quoted on the film's poster. "That kind of enthusiasm surely reflects what the film is—that it's a real achievement," said Guinness. It's an amazing work, the best thing since AKIRA. We've had some amazing reviews. It's just finished its theatrical run [in Europe], which was extremely limited. The real exposure of the film will come when it's released to video—that's when most people will see it."

Said Gleicher, "It's already beginning to show signs of being just a bit stronger, in the sense that the film is being held-over in an open release in various markets. We usually start in the center of the city or near major universities, and if it performs well, as we're now seeing that it does, then the theaters are ready to expand the second and third week to two or three outlying theaters that they also own, whether it's Sony Theaters or Landmark Theaters or another chain."

GHOST IN THE SHELL

REVIEW

Saves cyberpunk from the cinematic scrapheap.

GHOST IN THE SHELL

A Manga Entertainment Release of a Kodansha, Bandai Visual, and Manga Entertainment Production. Produced by Yoshimasa Mizuo, Shigeru Watanabe, Ken Iyadomi, Mitsunisu Ishikawa. Directed by Mamoru Oshii. Written by Kaunori Ito, based on the manga by Masamune Shirow. Director of photography: Jacques Haikin. Edited by Sonny Baskin. Music director, Kenji Kawai. Song "One Minute Warning" by Passengers (Brian Eno and U2). Animation director: Toshihiko Nishikubo. 4/96, unrated. 82 mins.

Major Motoko Kusanagi.....Mimi Woods
The Puppetmaster.....Abe Lasser

by Dan Persons

The moment comes halfway through GHOST IN THE SHELL: Major Motoko Kusanagi—the lithe, beautiful, and extremely dangerous member of the ultra-secret, government strike force, Section 9—has already taken out a foreign ambassador without batting an eyelash, and tracked down several victims of the Puppetmaster, a sophisticated hacker who has recently moved from manipulating financial markets to altering the memories of cyborg-enhanced humans. Having witnessed the devastation left in the cyber-hacker's wake—tortured souls who struggle to reconcile their former lives with the fantasies programmed into their brains—and having subsequently become suspicious of the government's complicity in the crimes, Kusanagi begins to question her own government-sponsored cyborg-enhanced identity. Taking a ferry into the city, she imagines herself staring down from bridges and sitting in cafes; the fine parameters of her reality blur as key elements of her life materialize along the crowded, futuristic harbor. It's a mesmerizing, seductive interlude that's as suprising as Schwarzenegger abandoning his AK-47 for a frolic in a field of wildflowers. This may be action-adventure, but it's action-adventure with a larger agenda.

In GHOST IN THE SHELL, director Mamoru Oshii explores the heaven and hell of cyborg life. The members of Section 9 are unabashed in the tech-enhanced prowess of their near-perfect cyborg bodies and computer brains. But they're also prone to a machine-like consistency, forcing them to recruit unaugmented humans in order to keep the random factor in play. And for all the blessings bestowed by their manufactured bodies, the cyborgs are virtual slaves to the government that financed their augmentations; neither Kusanagi nor her cohorts can quit without being forced to surrender their enhancements—cyber-body, electronic brain, the works. "There's not much left after that," says the Major with characteristic understatement. Not much, indeed—just the original grey-matter and, within that, what the characters refer to as "the ghost"; that indefinable quality that forms the human soul.

So tenuous is humanity's worth in this society and so keen is Major Kusanagi's appreciation of that fact, that when a damaged cyborg turns up equipped with no human brain at all but exhibiting definite signs of a ghost stored in electronic memory (the ghost, it turns out, of the Puppetmaster), it's enough to drive the troubled Major to drastic and perhaps life-threatening action. Confronted with evidence that her worst fears about the validity of her own soul are not mere fantasies, Major Kusanagi will place both flesh and metal on the line, ironically validating her own existence in the act of extracting, from the cyborg's ruined form, the truth behind the Puppetmaster's identity.

Lithe and lethal, the cyborg-enhanced assassin Major Motoko is the best femme fatale anime character since Makia in WICKED CITY.

If all this seems like heavy baggage for a film that also boasts its share of mammoth explosions, wall-rattling weaponry, and high-speed car chases, it should be noted that the actual plot engine of GHOST IN THE SHELL—something about the diplomatic force trying to deport an ousted dictator seeking asylum from the government—eventually sputters to a halt as the film turns to larger issues. In addition, where that other big-budget, big-issue anime classic, AKIRA, played its themes out on an ever-expanding scale to get its point across, GHOST tends to burrow inward, culminating not during the big-bang pyrotechnics of its climactic gun-battle but in a subsequent, dialogue-filled exchange between the mind-linked Kusanagi and the Puppetmaster. More intimate, and at times more obscure in its goals, the film begs repeat viewings—an easy enough demand, given superlative production values and animation as lush and beautiful as any coming out of contemporary Japan. (Catch that battle between a ghost-hacked saboteur and the camouflaged Kusanagi in a water-filled plaza. Live-action filmmakers only wish they could choreograph an unrestrained pummeling as exquisitely.) While Western filmmakers have too-often assumed that the path to cyberpunk begins and ends with the guest-casting of Henry Rollins, GHOST IN THE SHELL has the guts to return the much-maligned genre to the human values that had always formed its literary backbone. It's the action film for those who realize that a working brain is the force behind any action of consequence. □

With its sophisticated cyberpunk aesthetic, thematic ambitions, and impressive visuals, GHOST IN THE SHELL provides anime fans a film with the scope of AKIRA.

Was there any reluctance to tackle so elaborate an effort for their first co-production? "None whatsoever," Guinness replied. "If anything, we would have wanted it to be even more elaborate. From Manga's side, we could have easily done so. For Hollywood, this would be considered a low-budget film. For the cost of WATERWORLD, you could probably make forty GHOST IN THE SHELLs. Forty for the cost of *one* WATERWORLD! (Which means that GHOST's budget fell within the modest region of five million dollars.) For the impact and the stimulation you get out of GHOST IN THE SHELL, compared to the impact and stimulation you get out of WATERWORLD—when you look at the cost benefit of that, it's staggering, really staggering. I know what I'd do if I was the head of a large studio [laughs]."

Major Motoko's fellow cyborg soldier moves through a crowd during one of the film's many action highlights, a footchase in pursuit of the Puppetmaster.

Indeed, in terms of boosting the stock of adult-themed animation, GHOST has already paid back its investment. Said Guinness, "I recall a conversation between Eric Goldberg—the director of POCAHONTAS—and Oshii-san. Goldberg said, 'We might in the future be creating the kind of animation that Oshii-san has been doing.' The telling thing was, Goldberg told Oshii-san that it seemed quite easy for Japanese animation directors to bring their own tastes and opinions and expression to productions. He hinted that it was incredibly difficult for anyone at Disney to do that, because their priority is groupwork. I think that's reflected in GHOST IN THE SHELL. It's somebody's vision. It's not a manufactured film, made by committee, made by groups, made by marketing demographics, made by research figures. That's an important point: it's more in the style of how the film industry used to be. Someone has an idea; they work on it; they're around to make it and express it, and you have a film like GHOST IN THE SHELL. Whereas, when you work by committee and groups, you end up with something that is more manufactured."

Beyond the film's regard within the industry, GHOST stands to serve as a potent shot in the arm for the comatose genre of cyberpunk, a branch of science fiction that, Guinness agrees, has rarely found in cinema the humanistic roots clearly evident in its literary incarnations: "It's gone wide of the mark, and not only has it not found [its humanity]—it hasn't even attempted to find it. I think more issues of that kind are raised in the old STAR TREK series than in current films. This is why we love [GHOST] so much: it is, in my opinion, a very bold attempt to examine very weighty and important issues.

"There is scientific research that conclusively proves that a human mind can influence a computer. There's been statistical research done on it. That's beyond a doubt, that a mind can affect the outcome of a set of repetitive tasks or the generation of random numbers. In the space of a 90 minute film you can't go into things in too much depth, but to me the wonderful thing about GHOST IN THE SHELL is that it's quite visionary, and it does go as deep as it can regarding its concepts—which will become more and more important. Forgetting the way it looks, just talking about the pure subject matter, I think it's visionary in that sense."

Given its lush animation and sophisticated storyline, does Guinness expect GHOST IN THE SHELL to become the crossover hit for which anime fans have been praying; the one that lures in audiences who would never before have considered attending an animated film that didn't have the Disney name attached? "We're keeping our fingers crossed," the producer replied. "It could be a breakthrough film. Although I don't know—it's so individual. It is what it is, and it forces people to take it seriously. There's a lot of respect due the director for staying true to his vision. He could have made it more gratuitous, given the audience less time to think, and probably spoil his vision in the interest of commerciality. Ultimately, I think those that appreciate his vision will confirm his decision to do that. He was allowed to work as he wanted to work; which is great—that was our intention.

"It's my ambition and the company's ambition that we become as successful in our category as an adult Disney. I think we're just in the very infancy of adult animated filmmaking; more and more, audiences will come to expect sophisticated styles, sophisticated presentation of films that could only be made using animation. I think our experience—certainly in the U.K. and Europe—as pioneers in creating and bringing that genre to the attention of the mass-market will be invaluable in attaining those ambitions." □

GHOST IN THE SHELL

MANGA ENTERTAINMENT

The newest anime contender seeks to expand beyond the niche market.

Up until the late '80s, appreciation for Japanese animation was restricted primarily to hardcore fans, a group who almost reveled in the difficulties of their quest to obtain high-priced, Japanese-language copies of the latest titles. That situation changed once companies such as Streamline and A.D. Visions began bringing anime to American niche audiences in more accessible, dubbed form.

Manga CEO Marvin Gleicher: "We're knocking down barriers," he says of bringing anime to a wider audience.

Manga Entertainment, with its formation in 1991, is "the last company to come into the market," according to CEO Marvin Gleicher. But despite their late entry into the market, Manga has already helped redefined the audience for anime, pricing it's dubbed titles specifically for sell-through and working to get placement in such mass-market stores as MusicLand and Suncoast Video. Combining high-quality duping facilities, generally thoughtful English translations, and a well-regarded roster of titles (e.g., the introspective, RIGHT STUFF-like s.f. drama THE WINGS OF HONNEAMISE), Manga has managed to expand the audience for anime. (Streamline Pictures, it should be noted, simultaneously embarked on its own expansion program, taking advantage of a distribution deal with Orion Home Video to lower their prices and use the renowned AKIRA as a marketing wedge for wider distribution.)

"I'm a bit surprised that it [the response] has been better than expected," noted Gleicher. "I still don't understand how some of my competitors are selling half-hour tapes for $29.95 and the longer versions for $39.95. That's their prerogative, but we couldn't be in MusicLand at $39.95 for this type of animation."

Although Manga has followed Streamline's example by making the push into theatrical releases this year with GHOST IN THE SHELL ("We're knocking down those barriers," noted Gleicher, "attempting to book the films into open runs, not only into calendar houses, to show that these films do have legs"), the CEO concedes that, with a total of forty staffers both in the U.S. and Great Britain, their prime focus for the present is on the home-video front: "We've really attempted to maintain the highest quality in the films we acquire—which is not always possible—and in our duplication process, going direct from D2 or digital format into half-inch in real time using the highest quality video tape."

While the company is leaving the door open to future coproduction deals (prior to GHOST, Manga produced the surreal, stop-motion fantasy THE SECRET ADVENTURES OF TOM THUMB, and the Academy Award-winning short FRANZ KAFKA IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE), currently the big push is into such areas as broadcast television and interactive CD-ROMS—in the latter case, an adaptation of the popular MACROSS series.

"We're holding and maintaining that quality standard," said Gleicher. "We have always approached every film with the fans in mind—the original fans that like the Japanese versions with subtitles. We don't ever want to lose that as a base. They're a pretty picky group—nothing's ever perfect. I think anyone who has a little knowledge of Japan knows that—if you put forty of those fans in a room, every one of them will come up with a different translation as to what was actually meant. And many times they read more into it than the actual directors have expected.

"It's great, that enthusiasm and love of the genre," Gleicher concluded. "Those are the people that we really have to satisfy. Then I know that our quality is right on target." **Dan Persons**

Another notch in Henry Selick's belt

JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH
A Buena Vista release of a Walt Disney Pictures presentation. Producers: Denise DiNovi, Tim Burton. Executive producer: Jake Eberts. Co-producers: Brian Rosen, Henry Selick. Director: Henry Selick. Camera: Pete Kozachik, Hiro Narita, A.S.C. Editor: Stan Webb. Music & songs: Randy Newman. Production design: Harley Jessup. Conceptual design: Lane Smith. Animation supervisor: Paul Berry. Art direction: Bill Boes, Kendal Cronkhite. Costume design: Julie Slinger. Sound design: (Dolby), Gary Rydstrom. Visual effects supervisor: Kozachik. Screenplay by Karey Kirkpatrick and Jonathan Roberts & Steve Blood, from the book by Roald Dahl. 4/96, 80 mins. Rated PG.

James	Paul Terry
Spider	Susan Sarandon
Centipede	Richard Dreyfuss
Grasshopper	Simon Callow
Ladybug	Jane Leeves
Aunt Sponge/Glowworm	Miriam Margolyes
Aunt Sponge	Joanna Lumley
Old Man	Pete Postlethwaite
Earthworm	David Thewlis

by Mike Lyons

JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH may be fashioned from a variety of filmmaking techniques, but there is one intangible element that holds the film together: pure imagination. Springing to life first in the fertile mind of author Roald Dahl and then planted like a seed in the equally fertile mind of stop-motion director Henry Selick, JAMES is a unique film. Like all great fantasies from THE WIZARD OF OZ to TOY STORY, it has the ability to spark imagination in the mind of its audience.

Director Henry Selick, having already proved himself proficient in the arduous realm of stop-motion with 1993's THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS, now adds this impressive notch to his artistic belt. The film opens in live-action, telling the tale of young James (an excellent performance by newcomer Paul Terry), who is forced to live with his aunts, Spiker and Sponge (over the top villainy from Miriam Margoyles and Joanna Lumley) after his parents' death. Selick wisely chose to give these sequences the surrealistic look of stop-motion, which not only sets up the netherworld quality of the film but also makes the transition into the world of stop-motion less jolting.

When James enters the giant peach and encounters the humanized insects, the story pulls out of the slight stall laid upon it by the downbeat opening sequences. From the beginning, the animation is nothing short of a knockout. The hand crafted images are blended seamlessly with computer graphics to create such startling sequences as a battle with skeletons aboard an underwater pirate ship (a possible nod to Harryhausen's JASON AND THE ARGONAUTS), and another sequence in which the peach, tethered to a flock of sea gulls while floating at sea, comes under attack by a mechanical shark (this may be one of the best action sequences you'll see at the movies all year). Selick also uses JAMES as an excuse to experiment wonderfully with other animation forms, such as a hallucinogenic dream sequence, accomplished using cut outs a lá Monty Python.

James and one of his new insect friends, Grasshopper, on the trip to New York.

With such scenes, JAMES could have fallen into the same "style over substance" trap that turned many off to NIGHTMARE. But unlike the residents of that film's "Halloweentown," who at times seemed like nothing more than set dressing, the insects in GIANT PEACH are fully-developed oddball personalities, similar in many ways to TOY STORY's toys. Providing even more dimension is a great voice cast: British character actor Simon Callow gives just the perfect "veddy British" tone to Grasshopper; Susan Sarandon plays the sultry Miss Spider as Greta Garbo (she even says, "I prefer to be alone"); and Richard Dreyfuss pulls off a scene stealing performance as the Centipede, with his "Brooklynese" and off-the-cuff one liners.

The insects also add a great deal of depth to the story, warming up to James and helping him to overcome his fears (which are represented by the image of a Rhino-shaped storm cloud). The insects also perform the film's most poignant song "We're Family," one of five new compositions by Randy Newman, each fitting nicely into the plot, many of them infectious, including the gospel-like "Good News," which closes the film.

JAMES falls just short of being a perfect film, but its failings are small—such as in its conclusion, which combines live-action and animation in a way that seems clumsily executed and strangely out of joint with the rest of the film. Nevertheless, JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH is a satisfying experience that's perfect for anyone who needs a quick fix of pure imagination. □

FILM RATINGS

●●●●	Catch it opening night
●●●	Worth seeing first run
●●	Wait for second-run
●	Wait for video/cable
○	Fodder for MST-3K

JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH

Director: Henry Selick. Walt Disney, 4/96, 80 mins. With: Paul Terry, Susan Sarandon, Richard Dreyfuss, Joanna Lumley.

Don't be surprised if, much like the titular fruit, you feel you've been cast adrift in this live-action/stop-motion animated adaptation of the Roald Dahl children's classic. The story of a boy's fanciful trip to New York City, accompanied by the insect inhabitants of a massive peach, seems to have been a victim of an historic round of studio second-guessing, marked by a formless story (what lesson does James acquire from his flight across the ocean? Well, he does at least learn one way to avoid the inconvenience of a trip through customs), flat characterizations (only Susan Sarandon's coolly seductive spider hits any depth past the obvious and the treacly), and an overabundance of truly hideous and completely pointless songs (hey, I admire Randy Newman as much as anybody, but while a song like "Eating the Peach"—in which the insects exult over all the effluvia and offal they have ingested in their lives—must have sounded great when delivered in the composer's irony-laced monotone, it's practically unbearable in its final, jolly incarnation). As with THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS, director Henry Selick's animation is wonderfully expressive and impressively surreal—the film features many stylistic nods to Selick's far more fascinating short film, SLOW BOB IN THE LOWER DIMENSIONS. Looks can go only so far, though, and without the benefit of Tim Burton's sardonic instincts (not to mention Danny Elfman's minor-key proficiency), JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH sinks in the mire of its own syrup. ● **Dan Persons**

James is in for a bit of a shock when Mrs. Ladybug lends him a mirror so that he can see his new appearance now that he has entered the giant peach.

CINEMA
By Steve Biodrowski

MONSTERS IN THE CLOSET
How does horror rank in its portrayal of homosexuals?

Even if you don't have a specific interest in the subject, you might find Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman's THE CELLULOID CLOSET a worthwhile and entertaining film. Inspired by Vito Russo's book of the same title, the documentary traces the portrayal of homosexual characters throughout the history of mainstream Hollywood films, interspersing film clips with cogent commentary from a variety of interview subjects (e.g., Gore Vidal discusses adding a homosexual subtext to the relationship between Stephen Boyd and Charlton Heston in BEN HUR).

Although not specific to the genre, horror fans may find much of interest on view here. For instance,where else these days will you have a chance to see DRACULA'S DAUGHTER (1936) on a big screen in a pristine 35mm print—even if only for a minute or two?

Despite the over all excellence, the film does have its dubious moments, as when one commentator, Suzie Bright (who fails to live up to her name) complains that in order to see a lesbian scene on screen, she and her friends have in the past been reduced to watching a *vampire* film. The implication that this is somehow humiliating, unfortunately, goes unchallenged by the documentary. (Presumably she is referring to Tony Scott's tedious THE HUNGER, which is discussed elsewhere during by Susan Sarandon. Curiously, the footage devoted to her nude scene with Catherine Denueve is so far removed from Bright's comment that, if you weren't already familiar with THE HUNGER, you wouldn't know it *was* a vampire film.)

Also, clips are avoided from films which contradict the basic premise being advanced. For example, in a section devoted the '60s (which specialized in sympathetic but condescending portrayals of neurotic gay characters who usually wound up committing suicide as a result of their own self-loathing), no mention is made of Claire Bloom's attractive, entertaining, and completely self-confident character in Robert Wise's THE HAUNTING. Not only does she survive past the closing frame, but the real self-destructive neurotic in the film is Julie Harris' heterosexual character.

Despite CELLULOID CLOSET's overall excellence, conspicuously absent are any film clips that contradict the basic thesis: e.g., Claire Bloom's sympathetic portrayal in THE HAUNTING (seen here in bed with Julie Harris, no less!).

This raises an interesting question, which CELLULOID CLOSET doesn't have time to address: Does the horror genre have a better record than mainstream cinema when it comes to dealing with alternative forms of sexuality?

Well, not explicitly. But I would offer a qualified yes, if only because the fantasy nature of the genre allows filmmakers to deal with subjects on a symbolic or subtextual level, often making them palatable to a mainstream audience that might be turned off by an explicit representation. One could also argue (indeed many have) that, in the context of a horror film, several gay directors have been able to sneak in a camp sensibility that flies over the heads of many viewers. The classic example is James Whale, who cast Ernest Thesiger as outrageously effeminate characters in both THE OLD DARK HOUSE and BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN.

On another level, critic Robin Wood, in his influential essay, "The American Nightmare," made an extensive argument that the monsters in horror films are perceived as monstrous mostly because they stand in opposition to the status quo of society. In a white male patriarchal heterosexual society, so his argument goes, the objects of horror will often represent oppressed minorities of various kinds, including sexual minorities. And, he continues, because these characters represent aspects of the viewers' own psyches, which they have repressed in order to fit into society, they will on some subconscious level identify and sympathize with the monsters on screen.

Of course, the great thing about symbol and subtext is that they can be interpreted a variety of ways and thus have resonance for different people, depending on their point of view. Thus, David J. Skal *(Hollywood Gothic: The Tangled Web of Dracula from Novel to Stage to Screen)* could point out to me, "I discovered vampires and Dracula actually in the middle of the Cuban missile crisis. I didn't know why until many years later, when I started thinking about it. These undying beings provided a note of reassurance, a fantasy of survival and transcendence and power, that really wasn't available anywhere else in the culture at the time, [when] we were all being told we were going to be blown off the map. I gradually drifted away from it, and when I came back to it in the late '80s, when I started doing the research for the book that became *Hollywood Gothic*, I wasn't even aware until I finished the book why this had suddenly taken on a new importance for me. I realized with a kind of shock that it was at the point that I could no longer count the number of friends I had lost to AIDS that the vampire, with all of the elements of survival of death and transcendence of this blood threat, became important to me again; it became a kind of security blanket in a way. I think the fact that somebody like me, who spends a lot of time analyzing popular culture, could be blind to it while in the middle of it is testimony to how powerful these blind spots can be."

Of course, subtext isn't enough to please everyone. "Horror movies don't address sexuality except in symbols," complained one critic. "In the '90s, horror movies have taken homosexuality and put it out of the realm of existence. For example, vampires don't exist, so two men can go for each other as long as the sole purpose is to draw blood. I would say the genre had an excellent missed opportunity with the Anne Rice novel. You would have thought, with David Geffen as the executive producer, INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE would have been a bit braver, more audacious. To me, it was too much of an apology. The only moments that were homo-erotic and not apologetic were between Pitt and Banderas.

"Really, nothing has changed," he concluded. "If anything it's gone backwards. The most erotic thing I've ever seen was Ken Russell's LAIR OF THE WHITE WORM. It's probably the most outrageous horror film of the '80s, but the '90s don't have anything." □

REVIEWS

BARB WIRE

Directed by David Hogan. Gramercy/Polygram, 4/96. 99 mins. R. With: Pamela Anderson Lee, Temuera Morrison, Victoria Rowell.

Is there some law that only DC Comics can make decent film adaptations of their comic books? After striking out with DR. GIGGLES and TANK GIRL, Dark Horse Comics tries again, this time with futuristic female mercenary BARB WIRE. David Hogan's film stars Pamela Anderson Lee's breasts, derriere, legs, and face. There are some other folks in it, too—a supporting cast of familiar faces, in fact: Clint Howard (Ron's brother), Udo Kier (ANDY WARHOL'S DRACULA), and Steve Railsback (LIFEFORCE).

Chuck Pfarrer's so-called script is basically a distaff version of CASABLANCA (!) with Lee playing the Humphrey Bogart role in 2017, when America is controlled by the neo-fascist Congressionalist Army. Barb Wire (Lee) runs a bar in Steel Harbor, the last "free" city in the country. Back into her life comes former lover Axel (Morrison), a resistance fighter now married to rebel leader Cora D (Rowell), who carries the cure to the government-created super-HIV virus in her blood. Axel asks Barb to help him recover a pair of contact lenses that will allow Cora to get past the government's retinal scanners and into Canada, where they can synthesize the vaccine. Wire tells him to get lost but changes her mind when her blind brother (Jack Noseworthy) is killed by Railsback's insanely evil Congressionalist officer.

The ending deteriorates into a series of martial arts battles atop construction equipment, featuring Morrison and some stunt men, while Lee and Railsback spit at each other while dangling from a crane. Whoever thought Lee, with her Barbie doll body and Betty Boop voice, could be even marginally convincing as a tough action heroine must be living in their own comic book universe! No wonder the film made only $1.8 million its opening weekend. This is the fans' payback for Gramercy's decision to open BARB WIRE wide and stick MYSTERY SCIENCE THEATER 3000: THE MOVIE on only 26 screens.

● 1/2 Dan Cziraky

Bela Lugosi Jr., here seen with Mail (Vampire) Nurmi, appears in THE HAUNTED WORLD OF ED WOOD.

Johnny Depp plays William Blake, the titular DEAD MAN, guided on a spiritual journey by an Indian (Gary Farmer) who mistakes him for the late poet.

THE CRAFT

Directed by Andrew Fleming. Columbia Pictures, 5/96. 100 mins. R. With: Fairuza Balk, Robin Tunney, Neve Campbell, Rachel True.

This film brilliantly targets its intended audience: high-school girls. Unfortunately, that's where the brilliance ends, as the story that unfolds (basically HEATHERS with witchcraft) turns out to be poorly thought-out. The first unanswered question: 'What are these witches doing in Catholic school, and why doesn't the faculty do something?' (As is usually the case in Hollywood, the Catholic education has affected the students in no noticeable way, for good or ill; the story could have as easily been set in the public school system.) For a film that supposedly celebrates an alternative religion, the whole thing boils down to some horribly puritanical cliches: the good girl (i.e., the virgin) is empowered by the witchcraft, while the bad girl (i.e., the non-virgin) turns into a raving monster. All pretense of credibility is dropped in the final act, when the other two witches (who seemed to be favoring a break from their overbearing leader) lose all trace of their individual personalities and simply become stooges aiding the bad girl's persecution of our innocent heroine. By the way, this is the softest R-rated film in recent memory. ● Jay Stevenson

DARK SIDE OF THE HEART

Directed by Eliseo Subiela. Screened at Landmark's Nuart Theatre, L.A., 3/96. 129 mins. Unrated. With: Dario Grandinetti, Sandra Bellesteros, Nacha Guerva.

The Argentinian director of MAN FACING SOUTHEAST tries his hand at a fanciful romantic tale. Oliverio (Grandinetti) is seeking the perfect woman, one who "knows how to fly." (Those who fail the test are unceremoniously dumped through a trap door in his bed!) Ultimately, he gets his wish, only to have the tables turned on him, but the painful experience is for the best, curing him of his impossible romantic ideals.

As if often the case in Latin American cinema, the "fantasy" elements are presented matter-of-factly, with no need to rationalize their presence. As a result, one could argue that they are simply externalizations of the protagonist's thoughts, not meant to be taken literally. Particularly amusing are his conversations with Death, who continually tries to coerce this struggling poet to take a dead-end conventional job. Looking through the want ads, she muses, "Here's an opening for manager. The ad only says assistant manager, but the manager is old and sick. Let me take care of the rest."

●● Steve Biodrowski

DEAD MAN

Directed by Jim Jarmusch. Miramax, 5/96. 114 mins. R. With: Johnny Depp, Gary Farmer, Gabriel Byrne, Lance Henriksen, Michael Wincott, John Hurt, Iggy Pop, Crispen Glover, Robert Mitchum.

TWIN PEAKS goes West in this extremely weird black-and-white film from Jim Jarmusch. Depp (playing another innocent eccentric) heads to a steel town for a job but ends up wrongly wanted for murder. Wounded, on the run, he is taken under wing by an English-educated Indian, who mistakes him for the dead poet, William Blake (hence the title). Ultimately, his attempt to outrun the hired guns chasing him turns into a spiritual journey, in which he takes on the characteristics (of poet and gunfighter) that the others have erroneously attributed to him. The off-kilter style prevents the audience from being exactly sure how seriously to take the proceedings. The early sequences emphasize the humor of Depp's wide-eyed reactions to what he sees out West, versus what he expected, and the characters all seem lost in their own little worlds which barely intersect the plot of the film we're watching. Still, something about the texture and tone firmly grounds the film, preventing it from floating away into simple tongue-in-cheek spoofery.

●●● Steve Biodrowski

THE HAUNTED WORLD OF ED WOOD

Directed by Brett Thompson. Wood-Thomas Pictures, 5/96. 101 mins. Unrated. With: Dolores Fuller, Conrad Brooks, Loretta King, Paul Marco, Lyle Talbot.

Please, let this be the last word on Ed Wood, whose fifteen minutes are up. This documentary basically regathers the people already interviewed in FLYING SAUCERS OVER HOLLYWOOD: THE PLAN 9 COMPANION and has them rehash the same story we've already seen, read, and heard far too often. There are some redeeming moments, particularly from people who were not part of the regular Wood-stock company: Maila (Vampira) Nurmi, Gregory Walcott, and especially Bela Lugosi Jr, are amusingly outspoken in their desire not to mythologize the no-talent director. Lugosi is of particular interest, being a voice we haven't heard in previous examinations of Wood. "He was a user and a loser," says the resentful son of the famous actor, "who dragged my father down to his level." Overall this may correct some of the inaccuracies of the Scott Alexander & Larry Karaszewski script for ED WOOD, but at least Tim Burton managed to make that movie fun and entertaining.

● Steve Biodrowski

INSTITUTE BENJAMENTA

Directed by the Brothers Quay. Screened at Landmark's Nuart Theatre., L.A., 5/96. 107 mins. Unrated. With: Alice Krige, Gottfried John, Mark Rylance.

The Brothers Quay, famous along the art house circuit for their expressionistic stop-motion short subjects, try their hand at a live-action feature. Amazingly, the film manages to maintain the look and tone of their previous work (many of the insert close-ups and other short without actors appear to have been shot stop-motion). The film has an interesting idea at its core, a sort of satire of education systems and other institutions that run by their own arcane and often apparently pointless rules and regulations that fail to benefit the people working within them. "Maybe there is some meaning to all these nothings," our protagonist (Rylance) muses hopelessly at one point. Unfortunately, although this idea is effectively presented visually, it is not well dramatized in the story, which benefits little from feature length. The same points could have been made in half an hour. Still, the imagery is so fascinating that the film is never boring, despite of the lax pace.

●● Steve Biodrowski

LAWNMOWER MAN II

Directed by Farhad Mann. New Line Cinema, 1/96. 93 mins. PG-13. With: Patrick Bergin, Matt Frewer Austin O'Brien, Ely Pouget.

This laughable miscalculation utterly fails to cash in on the sleeper success of its progenitor. Credibility is immediately destroyed by the lame "facial reconstruction" excuse trotted out for the recasting of Frewer in the title role (replacing Jeff Fahey). Things get worse when director Mann's penchant for futuristic BLADE RUNNER cityscapes imply that the sequel is set at least 20 years in the future, but returning actor

The so-called "bitches of Eastwick" gather for a midnight fireside ceremony in THE CRAFT.

Austin O'Brien has only aged the four years that have elapsed between the two films! By far, the worst failing is the attempt to turn this into a kids' movie, complete with PG-13 rating: despite Patrick Bergin's presence, the focus is on O'Brien and his teenage hacker pals. To date, this formula (kids and computers) has proved to be a dismal failure, as evidence by last year's HACKERS.

● **Steve Biodrowski**

ANIMATION

ALL DOGS GO TO HEAVEN II

Directed by Paul Sabella & Larry Leker. MGM, 3/96. ? mins. G. Voices: Charlie Sheen, Dom DeLuise, Sheena Easton.

Unfortunately, the makers of ALL DOGS GO TO HEAVEN 2 didn't take Don Bluth's original premise and do something innovative with it. Bluth, who directed and produced the original, is not connected with the sequel, which serves as the launch pad for the new MGM animation studio. With ALL DOGS 2, at least the film's directors, Paul Sabella and Larry Leker, along with art director Deane Taylor, show that they can make a great looking film. The animation itself also doesn't disappoint, with more fluidity and movement than is standard non-Disney effort. ALL DOGS 2 also features a truly menacing villain in the form of Red, a half-demon-half-cat, who is represented by blood red color and sharp, jutting angles.

Unfortunately, many aspects of ALL DOGS 2 seem to intrude. One is the supporting characters, fashioned like something out of a REN AND STIMPY cartoon, which clashes with the more traditional look Bluth gave to the original cast. Then, there's Charlie Sheen, taking over from Burt Reynolds as the voice of Charlie Barker. Sheen does a great job, bringing a genial sincerity to the part; unfortunately, his voice doesn't fit the character and instead seems simply like voice-over. The final and more important debit is the plot, which is essentially a re-tread of the original, complete with the main characters, Charlie and Itchie, befriending an orphaned child.

With ALL DOGS 2, the new MGM Animation studio has proven that they can make an animated film; now they have to prove that they can make a good one.

● **Mike Lyons**

*"intense depiction of very bad weather"**

TWISTER

An Amblin Entertainment production. Directed by Jan De Bont. Produced by Kathleen Kennedy, Ian Bryce, Michael Crichton. Director of photography: Jack N. Green. Editor: Michael Kahn. Production designer: Joseph Nemec III. Art director: Dan Olexiewicz. Visual effects supervisor: Stefan Fangmeir. Special visual effects & animation: Industrial Light & Magic. Sound: Geoffrey Patterson. Music: Mark Mancina. Screenplay by Michael Crichton, Anne-Marie Martin.. 5/4/96, 114 mins. Rating: PG-13.

Jo Harding	Helen Hunt
Bill Harding	Bill Paxton
Dr. Jonas Miller	Cary Elwes
Melissa	Jami Gertz
Aunt Meg	Lois Smith

by Steve Biodrowski

TWISTER scores big in the roller-coaster thrills department, and ILM's truly awesome tornadoes make them the front-runner for this year's effects Oscar.

Well, the film is out, and the reviews are in. Predictably, the critics carping over TWISTER's alleged failings have proved that they don't appreciate the wonders of cinema magic, for this movie is a wonder to behold. Working from a simple premise (storm chasers pursue tornadoes in the hope of gaining information to build a better warning system), the film builds itself up almost solely out of action surrounding its title phenomenon.

As one would expect, DeBont directs the affair almost exactly as he staged SPEED: the action starts in the opening frame and never lets up. What's surprising is that, after an overwhelming opening sequence that stuns its audience into silence and then appreciative applause, the film actually manages to sustain this intensity level (unlike CLIFFHANGER, which opened with its best scene and fell downhill from there).

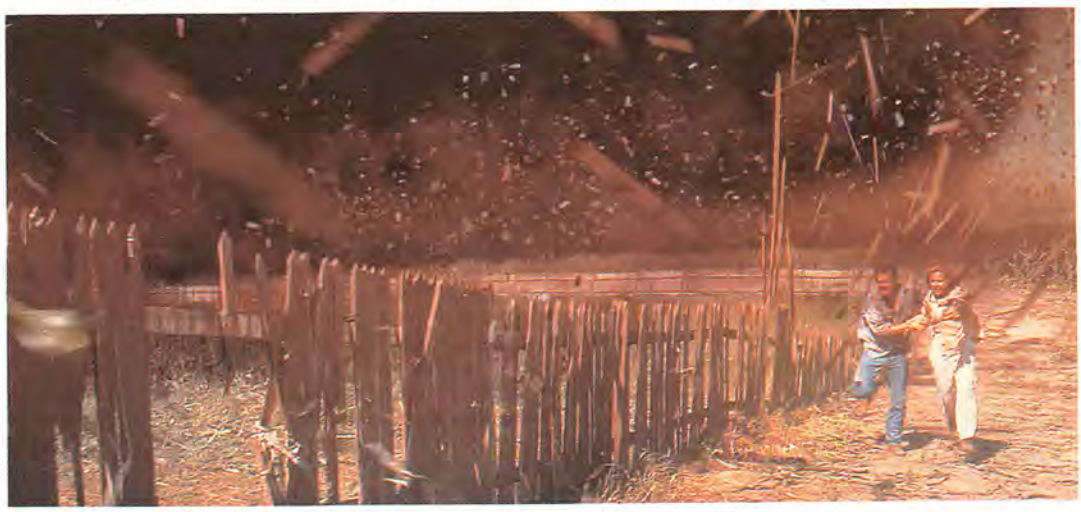
Along the way, there is little time for intrusive attempts at characterization, and thank god for it. What we learn about these people, we learn on the run, and the last thing the film needed was a sentimental interlude to bog down the action. Basically, the human interaction boils down to whether the estranged husband and wife team of Jo and Bill Harding (Helen Hunt and Bill Paxton) will get back together in spite of Bill's new fiance (Jami Gertz). To be honest, it's no surprise that they do, but the success of the film hardly rests on these dramatics, nor should it.

The film is far from lacking in personality; it is not the mechanical thrill machine some would accuse it of being. In fact, it has a rather amusing, eccentric sense of humor. Bonus points are awarded for the supporting characters' quoting an appropriate dialogue exchange from REPO MAN ("An ordinary person spends his life getting out of intense situations…A repo man spends his life getting into intense situations"). Extra bonus points are awarded for having THE SHINING playing on the drive-in screen, which is torn to pieces just as Jack mouths his infamous "Here's Johnny!" line.

Finally, we can be grateful that the film's antagonist (Cary Elwes), set up as an unsympathetic martinet, is not dismissed with audience cheers when he meets his demise. Whatever the differences that set him apart from our audience identification figures, his death is not milked for an easy laugh. (Even a film as otherwise good as SILENCE OF THE LAMBS couldn't resist the last-minute temptation to make a joke out of an unsympathetic character's demise.) Instead, here, the horror of the situation is portrayed through the helpless reaction shots of Hunt and Paxton, who obviously view this as no triumph over an opponent. And that's more humanity than you get in most action films these days. □

*Quoted from the M.P.A.A.'s rationale for rating the film PG-13.

The best is saved for last: Hunt and Paxton flee a tornado ripping up a picket fence at the film's climax.



LASERBLAST

By Dennis Fischer

TREMORS & TREMORS 2
Direct-to-video sequel fails to equal the original.

In 1989, Universal released a delightful little '50s-style monster movie called TREMORS. This lively tribute featured a desert setting, a small number of characters in an equally miniscule community, a largely unseen menace, and several entertaining thrill scenes. The film was modestly conceived and expertly executed. In fact, in some ways, it was better than some of the movies on which it modeled itself.

The film succeeded in creating two lively, blue collar characters, Earl Basset (Fred Ward) and Val McKee (Kevin Bacon), who joke and work together, bickering and bonding like real friends. It also manages to be funny, scary, and suspenseful in ways that other genre films often attempt but rarely achieve. Writer-producers S.S. Wilson and Brent Maddock went on to write the SHORT CIRCUIT movies, and debuting director Ron Underwood has since directed the delightful television specials MOUSE ON A MOTORCYCLE and RUNAWAY RALPH, as well as the features CITY SLICKERS, HEART AND SOULS, and SPEECHLESS.

MCA Home Video recently released one of their Signature Collection special editions of TREMORS on laser, which scores over the earlier version by being letterboxed (1.85 aspect ratio). Though it crops some information from the top, it has a sharper, clearer picture, contains chapter stops, and adds a supplementary disc which includes a documentary on the making of the film, trailers, outtake footage including a different ending discarded after previews, and some production stills.

Though the project owes something to the OUTER LIMITS episode "Invisible Enemy" written by Jerry Sohl, Wilson recalls the inspiration as coming from sitting on a rock in a desert and wondering what it would be like to have something in the dirt try to get him. He originally dubbed the creatures "landsharks" until that became a running gag on SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE. In the film, they are simply dubbed "graboids." (Where these sandworm-like creatures come from is deliberately left vague).

The creatures themselves were designed by Alec Gillis and Tom Woodruff Jr., using a combination of techniques which are illustrated on the supplementary disc. The exact nature of this menace is kept mysterious at first, creating some good suspense scenes as people are attacked by unseen underground monsters. The script is intriguingly constructed so that it offers constant challenges to our heroes for which they must come up with clever and resourceful solutions.

Coinciding with the release of its direct-to-video sequel, the original TREMORS received MCA's Signature Collection treatment on laserdisc.

Fred Ward was cast based on his amusing turn in John Binder's little seen science-fiction comedy, UFORIA, and Kevin Bacon (FLATLINERS) finally loosens his previously stiff acting style in playing McKee. Especially amusing are Michael Gross (cast against type) and country singer Reba McEntire as married survivalists who see the entire event as an opportunity to put their arms hardware to the test.

Additionally, MCA Home Video has released a letterboxed, direct-to-video sequel entitled TREMORS 2: AFTERSHOCKS, also written and produced by Brent Maddock and S.S. Wilson, with Wilson handling the directorial chores this time around. As is typical with sequels, the second time around to the well doesn't prove as rewarding, though Maddock and Wilson have figured out enough fresh twists that the film is never boring.

Warner returns as perennially down-on-his luck Earl Basset, while Kevin Bacon has been replaced with a gung-ho young partner Grady Hoover (Christopher Gartin), who lures Basset to confront the subterranean beasties once more when they show up at a Mexican oil field. Michael Gross also makes a late but important appearance as Burt Gummer, sans McEntire this time out.

Gillis and Woodruff create the graboids once more. This time they have CGI, and the worms undergo some significant changes, which diminishes their size but increases their capability. The changes do stretch credulity to the limit, especially as the sonic detectors of the original are replaced with "natural" infrared heat sensors, but the whole premise is farfetched from the gitgo.

The major disadvantage of the sequel is that it cannot recreate those eerie early attacks from the first film which helped build atmosphere and suspense. We learn that the graboids are back in the opening scene, and then the problem simply remains one of how to get rid of them. This time around Basset is better prepared to meet the threat, though changes in the creatures do create new complications. Unfortunately, the relationship between Basset and Hoover's character lacks the charm and humor of the Ward-Bacon pairing. The result is a movie that entertains on a monster-movie level but falls short of the original.

For those interested in a gander at authentic '50s science fiction flicks rather than contemporary tributes to them, MCA Home Video offers THE GOLDEN AGE OF SCIENCE FICTION THRILLERS Volumes 1 and 2. Volume 1 offers two fine Jack Arnold thrillers: IT CAME FROM OUTER SPACE, with a stereo soundtrack for the first time, and TARANTULA. Both films are atmospheric efforts set in the isolated California desert, the former benefitting from a nifty treatment by Ray Bradbury. Additionally, volume 1 has Virgil Vogel's THE MOLE PEOPLE, a pedestrian effort about researchers finding a lost underground civilization, and Nathan Juran's THE DEADLY MANTIS, unfortunately one of the dullest enlarged insect films of the '50s. Trailers for all four films are featured at the end of the last disc.

Volume 2 is likewise a mixed bag, offering another Jack Arnold effort, MONSTER ON THE CAMPUS, which inspired a sequence in ALTERED STATES, plus film, John Sherwood's interesting THE MONOLITH MONSTERS, based on an idea by Arnold, which features one of the most unusual menaces in any science fiction film. The set also has a letterboxed transfer of THE LAND UNKNOWN, wherein scientists crash land on an Antarctic island with stiff dinosaurs, and Ed Dein's THE LEECH WOMAN, which is more horror science fiction, concerning an unscrupulous matron who discovers that Pineal fluid can temporarily restore youth at the cost of the donor's life. The latter two films are notable for their willingness to present largely unlikable main characters who (mostly) maintain audience interest but not sympathy. Trailers for these films are included as well.

These are genuine blasts from the past, sure to evoke memories of noisy matinee screenings or early television viewing. The black and white prints are largely in excellent condition and have been generously chapter encoded and close captioned. For those who wish to remember a time when imagination freshened up the effects seen onscreen, when amazing transformations, incredible invasions of aliens

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NBC's killer calamari fails to whip JAWS.

THE BEAST

An NBC four-hour mini-series, filmed in Sydney and New South Wales by Michael R. Joyce Prods. and Dan Wigutow; Director: Jeff Bleckner ; Written by J.B. White based on the novel "Beast" by Peter Benchley.;Producer: Tana Nugent ; Co-executive producer, Julie Cohen.; Executive producers, Dan Wigutow, Peter Benchley;. Camera, Geoff Burton; editor, Tod Feuerman; music, Don Davis; production designer, Owen Paterson; art direction, Colin Gibson; visual fx supervisor, Gene Warren Jr.; Shown Sunday 4/28 and Monday 4/29 9-11pm on NBC..

Cast: William Petersen, Karen Sillas, Charles Martin Smith, Ronald Guttman, Missy Crider, Sterling Macer Jr., Denis Arndt, Adrienne-Joi Johnson, Larry Drake, Murray Bartlett, Laura Vasquez

by Steve Biodrowski

William Petersen, Karen Sillas, and Larry Drake hunt THE BEAST's killer squid.

The problem with any predator-on-the-loose scenario is that, unless a writer is going to create a monster of mythical proportions, the question always remains: Why can't the characters just go kill it? (As an inside joke, in his novel *White Shark*, Peter Benchley portrays how easily two hotshot young men who know what they're doing can land a Great White with nothing more than standard tuna fishing tackle. So much for the entire plot of *Jaws*!) Because the Giant Squid is less of a known quantity than many animals, its destructive prowess and near indestructibility are less a glaring assault on credibility than most. In his book, Benchley also went out of his way to evoke a mythic sort of tone toward his monster, even going so far as to dub it "the last dragon."

Still, Benchley faced a problem that other workers in this field hadn't: namely, he'd already covered this territory, so what more could he say on the subject? The answer, unfortunately, is not much. Although *Beast* is an enjoyable read, his effort to hoe new ground doesn't always bear fruit. The television adapters, on the other hand, take to the JAWS similarities all too eagerly—as if, by working from a novel by the author of *Jaws* they felt that they were absolved from any accusation of ripping off JAWS.

Hence, we get a television scenario that alters the book's text to make the script more like Spielberg's film (e.g., a smaller squid is killed midway through, so the community believes the threat is over; the fishing boat's engine conks out at a crucial point in the sea hunt climax). Viewed on its own terms, the results are moderately entertaining. The production values are professional, and the cast is strong enough to make something out of characterizations that are basically there to serve the needs of the plot. A few sequences even manage to work up something approaching suspense.

What comes across well, if only briefly, is Benchley's form of no-nonsense, non-bleeding heart environmentalism. His novel specifies that the Beast's assault on humanity is caused by a change in the food chain resulting from fishermen who "weren't content with making a living and wanted to make a killing." The telefilm takes the argument further, when Whip Dalton claims that the beset town has no right to hunt the squid because they brought the tragedy on themselves. (Give actor William Petersen extra credit for saying that with a straight face.)

Even this minor subtext isn't enough to lift the film beyond the usual revenge-of-nature scenario. Ultimately, it's a monster flick, and its effectiveness rests on how well that monster from the deep is portrayed. Here the film's failings are readily apparent. Although the special effects are good, the on-screen imagery is never sufficient to match the expectations raised by characters' descriptions of the squid's destructive power. More than that, there is no sense of the kind of terror that arises from awe in the face of something truly astounding, as opposed to merely slimy and horrible. 20,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA (which is referenced in the dialogue here) created a better sense of menace in its brief confrontation with a squid. Even something as hokey as IT CAME FROM BENEATH THE SEA gave audiences a truly gargantuan monster; its unrealistic proportions made it somehow more memorable than the creature on display here.

Ultimately, no undersea menace has ever matched *Moby Dick*. Melville knew that a whale was not enough of a threat unless its size stood for something big in mythic terms. By using his whale as a symbol for a perplexing mystery (is the Moby Dick an intelligent, malicious animal; or are its seemingly intentional acts merely the anthropomorphization by Ahab?), Melville managed to probe a fascinating question with a philosophical subtext. That's a tall order for any imitator to fill, and so far no one's managed to achieve it. □

Author Peter Benchley on bringing his Beastly best-seller to television.

By Michael Beeler

Peter Benchley, author and co-screenwriter of JAWS, is intent on reminding us that the picturesque waters of the Atlantic Ocean are only a facade for terror and death. In the two-part NBC mini-series THE BEAST, which aired on April 28 and 29 just prior to sweeps week, he once again brought a monster up from the depths of his imagination, and earned the network a ratings bonanza in the process.

The four-hour tele-film, directed by Jeff Bleckner, with William Petersen (MANHUNTER), Karen Sillas (UNDER SUSPICION), and Larry Drake (DARKMAN), was based on Benchley's 1991 novel, titled simply *Beast*, about a Giant Squid. "The premise was: this is the last dragon—the animal that nobody's ever seen alive. It's the last big predator. And suddenly, because of the diminution of the food chain in the ocean around Bermuda, it comes up, which it normally never does, and begins to attack people.

"It starts with a couple in a sailboat, and the sailboat sinks and they're in a small raft off Bermuda. That's the first encounter. Then other people out on the ocean begin to see that this thing is out there and it comes up and gets them and a series of divers. It has a certain JAWS parallel in the question of how does a community cope with the sudden advent of a big natural force, that is upsetting the natural balance, is eating people, and won't go away."

The idea of a lethal giant squid on the rampage is not a new concept. Omnivorous octopi have appeared in such fare as 20,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA, VOYAGE TO THE BOTTOM OF THE SEA, and IT CAME FROM BENEATH THE SEA. TENTACLES, a 1977 Italian-made movie about a giant octopus, is one

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of the few films to be centered on the terror of a multi-armed mollusk from the deep. There have been some accusations that THE BEAST bears some notable structural similarities to TENTACLES, which is interesting because TENTACLES was a rather obvious attempt to remake JAWS with an octopus instead of a shark.

Regardless of who was inspired by whom, Benchley felt that the historical facts and mythical stories that surround the largest living aquatic invertebrate would make for an intriguing little story. And, in truth, some of the facts that surround the giant squid, that live at depths of 1,000 to 2,000 feet, are quite interesting. They have relatively large brains and can grow up to sixty feet in length. They are also the fastest swimming invertebrate and have been known to snap steel cables with their beak-like mouths.

"The question is whether the giant squid is something that is anthropophagus [man-eating]," said Benchley, who researched the subject after he started fishing for giant squid in 1979 in Bermuda, with a great Bermudian diver-fisherman-naturalist named Petty Tucker. "Is it a myth or not? Nobody really knows. There's been an awful lot of talk throughout the centuries that these things attack boats and people and all sorts of other things. And, there's plenty of evidence that in fact they have attacked small boats and people in the past.

"Melville wrote about it in *Moby Dick*, as having seen the titanic struggle between the giant squid and the sperm whale. It goes right back to the Greek writers and the animal known as the Kraken [a legendary Scandinavian sea monster] by the Norwegians. There is a thought that Homer's writings (*The Illiad* and *The Odyssey*) include a monster that was a giant squid. So, it's a wonderful creature of myth and fact, and it made for a good story."

A submersible heads underwater to seek out the Giant Squid. You just know it's not going to come back up.

Seen from a rescue copter overhead, a burning ship roasts the beastie. Inset: Benchley discussed giant squid on a news segment following the screening.

Getting that good story made into a film was a bit of a push and pull affair. "Universal, the motion picture company, optioned it first, and I wrote a screenplay for them," said Benchley, who made a cameo appearance in JAWS as a reporter on the beach. "But they decided that it would be too expensive to make. Then John Carpenter (ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK) came in and said that he would direct it but only if he could write the screenplay, because he could make it cheaper. So, he wrote his own screenplay, which turned out to be more expensive even than mine." Universal Pictures eventually abandoned the project, which was subsequently picked up by NBC Television. Benchley estimated that NBC was able to produce the movie for around $10 to 12 million, which is a third of what Universal Pictures thought it would cost.

Benchley admitted that, other than crafting the first draft of the script, he had very little input on the NBC movie, although he does receive an exec producer credit. "I I wrote the feature film script, and then a man named J. B. White took it and made it from two hours into four hours," said Benchley. "I met him down there on the set, and we chatted. But I was only there very briefly."

It was Benchley's love of the sea that lead him to write the novels *Jaws, Beast*, and *White Shark*. He noted, "I started doing sea novels because I grew up on the ocean. I knew a lot about the ocean, and I was interested in it. So, in 1973 I started to tell a long story about a fish. And, because I spent all my time on the ocean, it was logical for me to continue doing those things."

The next film you can expect from Benchley will be a feature remake of SEA HUNT, based on the old TV series with Lloyd Bridges. Producer Debra Hill, from the set of ESCAPE FROM LA, said, "It's set to begin filming this summer. Peter Benchley and Tony Peckin wrote the script for MGM; Peter wrote the first draft. When we began the project, we said, 'Who is the biggest writer of underwater adventure movies? Peter Benchley! Let's see if he is interested.' He came up with a really good concept. It's more of a treasure hunt movie, but we go to the depths of the ocean that haven't been filmed before and we do find some very interesting sea creatures."

As for other future film projects, Benchley wouldn't say. It might be safe to speculate that the ratings success of THE BEAST may speed up interest in bringing his 1994 novel *White Shark* to the big screen. The book has a bit of CREATURE FROM THE BLACK LAGOON, in that it features a creature from the deep with the ability to leave the water and stalk its prey on dry land. Well, so much for feeling safe when you reach the shore. □

IMAGI-MOVIES rises from the grave to haunt NBC's Benchley-based telefilm.

By Jay Stevenson

The words have more than a slightly familiar ring, and not just because they consciously emulate an old Rod Serling TWILIGHT ZONE voiceover: "You are now entering another dimension, so scout around and be patient, because you never know what could be hopping or flying towards you from around the corner. These people have gods for everything, so say a prayer to their gods."

This passage is read aloud as THE BEAST is heading into its final act. The words begin in voice-over, lending a mythic tone as our intrepid crew sails off in search of the killer squid; then the image dissolves back to a hospital room, where a character is reading the passage aloud, from a magazine folded over in her hands, hiding the cover.

Earlier in the show, Whip Dalton (William Petersen) had visited his friend in the hospital and plunked down what he rather contemptuously called "those science-fiction magazines you like to read." The clear impression to anyone without a videotape recording and freeze frame capability is that these are prop magazines and that the passage being read from them was written by teleplay adapter J.B. White.

However, compare this scene to the final paragraph of Dr. Craig D. Reid's "Fant-Asia Video" article from *Imagi-Movies* issue 2:4: "You are now entering another dimension, so scout around and be patient because you never know what could be hopping or flying towards you.The Chinese have gods for everything, so say a prayer to the Chinese god of film Dian Ying."

NBC had requested permission to display issues of issues of *Cinefantastique* and the now defunct *Imagi-Movies*, but quoting a passage out loud as part of the dialogue was a complete surprise, especially to Dr. Reid, who was a bit perplexed to get a phone call asking for his reaction. "Oh really? I taped it, but I haven't watched it yet," was his initial reply. After he finally had a chance to view the miniseries, he seemed to be amused rather than offended by this bit of uncredited borrowing. Laughing that his words had been used as dialogue on a national television broadcast, he simply shrugged it off and joked, "Oh well, I'll just add THE BEAST to my resume!" □

BIBLIOFILE

By Allen Callaci

THE GREAT WHITE STEAL

Peter Benchley swims off with similar storylines.

Just when you thought it was safe to go back in the water...

Over twenty years ago, audiences were screaming as a giant man-eating shark made Steven Spielberg a household name. His terrifying film JAWS was based on a bestseller by Peter Benchley, who co-authored the film version with screenwriter Carl Gottlieb.

Benchley got the inspiration for *Jaws* when he heard of the capture of a 17-foot, 4500-pound Great White Shark off Montauk, Long Island in 1965. In *Publishers Weekly*, he said the book came about in a 'What If' way: "What if a resort town, dependent financially on summer residents, were to be hit by a natural disaster, [like] a great white shark?" Based on this pitch, Bantam Books paid him $300,000, and the book's international publication rights were bought by every major country, from Japan to Finland. Universal Studios then paid him $175,000 for film rights and a screenplay.

A lot can happen in twenty years. The success of JAWS changed both men. The film became the highest-grossing movie ever (until *Star Wars* dethroned it three years later), and Steven Spielberg went on to become the most successful filmmaker of all time, winning Oscars and critical acclaim and topping JAWS at the box-office with films like E.T. and JURASSIC PARK. Meanwhile, Benchley, the grandson of humorist Robert Benchley, never lived up to the expectations of *Jaws* and went back to the depths with other undersea thrillers.

In 1991, Benchley released *Beast*, a book with an intriguing premise: a beach community, dependent on summer tourists, is being eaten alive by an undersea monster. Though critics felt it was just a rehash of his best-selling novel, they didn't appreciate his twist: this time it's a man-eating *squid*, not a shark. The author followed this with *White Shark*, about a Nazi-created undersea monster who is raised from hibernation and wreaks havoc on a modern-day beach community. The critics again noted the similarities between this and his first book.

Hollywood came knocking on Benchley's door for both projects. *Beast* became a big-budget miniseries for NBC, with William Peterson and DARKMAN's Larry Drake (after being considered as a feature film by both John Carpenter and Wes Craven), while *White Shark* is heading for the big screen as a feature film, which may be directed by FX wizard Stan Winston. This must delight the author, after being marooned for the failure of the film version of THE ISLAND(1980) and such low-selling, sea-sickening books as *The Girl And The Sea Of Cortez* (E.T. with a giant, friendly Manta Ray), *Q-Clearance*, and *Rummies*. It's little wonder he returned to sea monsters and success.

Because filmmakers and readers are so excited about Benchley's return to familiar *Jaws* territory, they have failed to notice the similarities between his books and two late '70s films. Benchley has stated that his material has come "from experiences near the sea," but cynics might argue they could also come from the cable-TV in his living room.

Beast bears a startling resemblance to TENTACLES (1977), a low-budget JAWS rip-off starring Bo Hopkins and John Huston, about a giant octopus ravaging a beach community outside San Diego. Some of the similarities between the two are surprisingly blatant. Both *Beast* and *Tentacles*, feed on two pleasure boaters; both are tracked down by a simple seaman (Bo Hopkins in TENTACLES, the improbably named Whip Darling in *Beast* [changed to the more macho sounding "Dalton" in the NBC mini-series); both the squid and the octopus crush mini-submarines containing scientists; and both the squid and the octopus are finally killed by avenging whales (the octopus is eaten by a killer whale, whereas Benchley has the daring originality to have his Beast perish at the jaws of a sperm whale.)

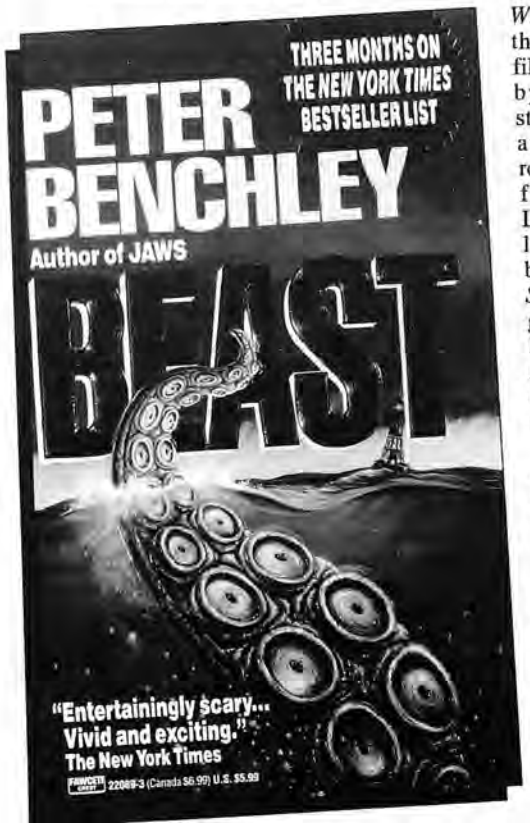
It's ironic that NBC would run BEAST , as they ran TENTACLES in prime time back in 1980 to capitalize on the ratings success of ABC when it first aired JAWS in November, 1979.

Benchley's novel *White Shark*, the story of a Nazi-created experiment reactivated in present day—a Blond, murderous underwater zombie who attacks silently, without provocation—bears a marked resemblance to the 1977 film SHOCK WAVES (a.k.a. DEATH CORPS). SHOCK WAVES just happens to be about a Nazi-created experiment reactivated in present day—Blond, murderous underwater zombies who attack silently, without provocation.

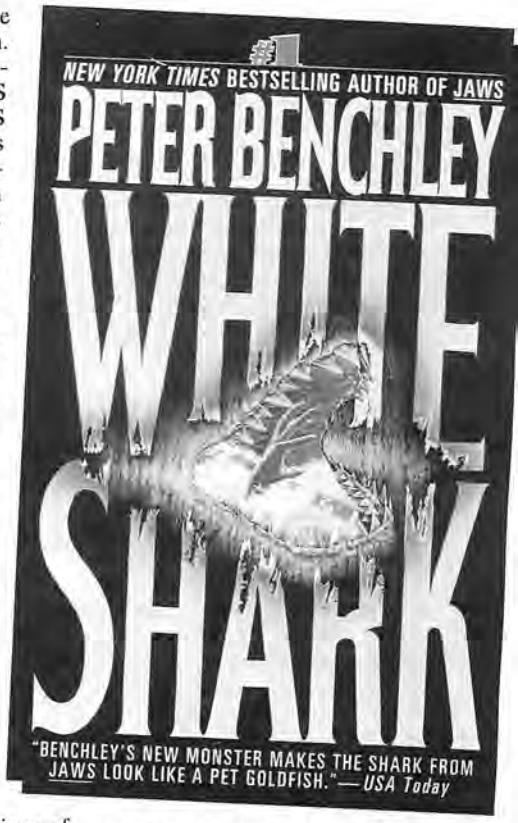
SHOCK WAVES, which stars Luke Halpin (FLIPPER) and a pre-INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS Brooke Adams, tells the story of a group of tourists on a pleasure cruise, who become shipwrecked on an island with a German officer (Peter Cushing), who is aware that his aqua-zombies have escaped their watery tombs and are wandering the island. *White Shark* has it's aqua zombie escape his watery tomb and wandering a beach community. (Benchley loves beach communities!)

White Shark and SHOCK WAVES share numerous similarities, including the way the monsters surface and peer at their prey and the explanations for the horrifying Nazi experiments. One wonders whether SHOCK WAVES' director and co-writer Ken Wiederhorn, who made the creepy, effective film on a shoestring budget, has even been offered a crack at directing WHITE SHARK. He's able to do a lot with little money and would be familiar with the material.

While the lingering success of Steven Spielberg's superb JAWS is what makes *White Shark* and *Beast* viable film properties, at the time JAWS was being made, Benchley had nothing good to say about the film or it's director. "Wait and see," he confidently told *The Los Angeles Times* in 1974, "Steven Spielberg will one day be known as the greatest second-unit director in America." □



Benchley's *Beast* replaces the white shark from Jaws with a giant squid, but much else remains the same.



***White Shark* is less derivative of *Jaws*, but it does bear similarities to SHOCK WAVES, the 1977 film.**

NOSTALGIA
By Diana J. Zemnick

INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS
The grandaddy of pod people movies still holds up.

There was something paralyzingly chilling invading movie theatres and affecting audiences worldwide in the '50s. The age of science-fiction horror flicks made a landmark impression, germinating from the fears, confusion, and insecurities of people during the Post-War era of the red scare, threats of conformity, and McCarthyism. Particularly interesting was the fascination with mind-control, possibly due to the public's interest in publicized stories of GI's being brainwashed in Korean POW camps during this time. Consequently, the 1950s has been designated the "Age of Paranoia."

In spite of the world's unrest, it was a rare and phenomenal time to be growing up. I was only a few months shy of enlightened age of 10 when the classic INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS hit screens for its debut on February 5, 1956. A 10-year-old is not concerned with any political overtones that may be woven into the storyline of a film. Up till then, my experience of horror films was comprised of various monsters: vampires, mummies, King Kong.

This was no way to prepare for INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS, as I discovered when I attended the premier at the Lowe's Paradise in the Bronx, N.Y. The theatre alone was an experience, vivid in lavish decor and architecturally unique. When the curtain rose, it heralded what was to be a rude awakening into a new dimension of horror. It was too late to leave the theatre. I was completely engrossed as well as apprehensive at the unfolding plight of Dr. Miles Bennell (Kevin McCarthy), who returns home from a medical conference to find many of his patients suffering an epidemic of mass hysteria, complaining that their friends and relatives aren't really their friends and relatives anymore.

King Donovan (left), Kevin McCarthy, and Dana Wynter eye a pod duplicate of Donovan—physically exact in every way but lacking human emotions.

Director Don Siegel cleverly utilized off-center camera angles to show that something is very wrong, distorted, not normal. The horror is almost totally off-screen, in the mind of the viewer, and we can't help being drawn into the realm of psychological terror, as we follow Miles' attempt to uncover the truth about the deadly mystery plaguing the small town of Santa Mira.

Of course, the answer is that the innocent people of Santa Mira are being snatched by alien invaders—pods that duplicate the true residents and take their place. In the electrifying climax, Miles is seen running wildly along the highway, screaming at passing motorist, trying to warn them of the invasion, his words addressed directly into the camera: "You're in danger! They're here already! You're next! You're next!"

Originally, the film was void of its prologue, epilogue, and narration, which wrap this paranoid story up into a traditional Hollywood happy ending, in which Miles tells his story to some unbelieving officials—who change their minds when a crashed truck reveals the pods Miles has been describing to them.

In a recent interview, actor Kevin McCarthy discussed being brought back six months after the film had been completed. "I flew out and worked a day and a half with Whit Bissell and Richard Deacon on the additional prologue-epilogue sequences. It happened that Siegel got stuck with a studio situation—a pip-squeak studio called Allied Artists, who, at the time, was a little company that made exploitive films. A guy named Steve Broidy was running the studio, and he wouldn't accept the film the way it was in its original format, on the justification that America wasn't known for making depressing films. Therefore, he insisted on a new ending. So the entire story is now a flashback, with the narration laid on the soundtrack, where there was none before."

What was it like to go back and redo something that had been done right the first time? "It was better that Siegel did the changes, rather than someone else. That was his point: 'If I don't do it, somebody else will. I'm doing it, and I think you'd better, too.' I don't know what they would have done [with my character] if I hadn't agreed...shoot me from the back—or in the back!"

The last time McCarthy saw the film was when the Sci-Fi Channel asked him to present their airing of it. "It was a beautiful, fine, clean print," enthused the actor. "I brought my pod down and regaled the customers with stories of what happened when it was made. The film holds up. Siegel did it, and that's it—it's hard to beat what he did."

INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS was one of the most influential films of its era, having generated a variety of spin-offs (IT CONQUERED THE WORLD, et al) and two outright remakes: Philip Kaufmann's well-regarded INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS in 1978, and Abel Ferrara's less successful BODY SNATCHERS in 1993. While these features are more eye-catching and impressive, they do not significantly improve upon the plot of these terrifying pods and their abhorrent mission to replace the entire human race with emotional duplicates.

The original remains a truly remarkable film, having lost little of its power. Daniel Mainwaring's imaginative script touches on or primal fear of being programmed and dominated in the way we think, feel, and act. It is the struggle for survival that becomes a psychological journey to confirm what is most important: our humanity.

Unlike the more blatant films of today, this classic chiller has a refreshing sense of understatement and low-key tension. Technically, the shadowy play of the black-and-white photography feeds off of our fear of the dark. It's a magnificent piece of manipulation that reaches the obscure inner recesses of our minds. Republic Pictures released a colorized version on video in 1988, but this process greatly detracted from the horror that was so evident in the black-and-white original. The emphasis on mood, intensity,a nd psychological degeneration were deflated rather than enhanced.

Till this day, the sequence wherein Miles discovers that his love interest, Becky Driscoll (Dana Wynter) has been "snatched" carries a palpable terror for me, recalling that long ago initial viewing, when the theatre was still and not a sound was heard. Indelibly printed on my memory is the panicked expression on Miles face after kissing the cloned Becky and realizing the awful truth. It's a highly unusual movie that can continually frighten on such a level each time you see it. □

Actor Kevin McCarthy today: "BODY SNATCHERS holds up—it's hard to beat what [director] Don Siegel did."

Kevin McCarthy interviewed by Steve Biodrowski.

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GODZILLA
continued from page 6

their budget got so high. We don't work that way."

In defense of his expensive approach, DeBont said, "You either make it in a totally new way, where you absolutely believe this monster exists, or you make him like the Japanese do it, with a man in a costume, and then you can make it for $10-million or less. But somewhere in between would be a big, giant mistake, and that is what I hope they're not going to do. I hope they're not just going to use all miniatures, because then let's just look at the Japanese movies again—that's what they've been doing for 30 years or more, and they're fun. Listen, I have every single Godzilla film on tape; I know my monster! I was in Tokyo last year, and I just missed the new one [GODZILLA VS. DESTROYER]. They showed me the trailer, and I had seen the sets just before that, and they looked pretty cool. If you do it half right, that would be a big mistake, in my opinion."

Another decision yet to be made is whether Stan Winston will be retained to design Godzilla, as he was under DeBont's tenure in 1994. Winston's Digital Domain had reportedly done extensive design work on a Godzilla that resembled the Japanese original but had a more realistic skin and physical structure. Devlin praised Winston as "the best in the business" but conceded that he may be too expensive. "Whether or not that's going to make economical sense for us to do that, I can't say. We've always had a very good experience using our own people and developing our own special effects and not going to the top places in town. So far, I don't think our quality has suffered at all."

Devlin hinted that he and Emmerich might like to make their Godzilla more animalistic than the familiar lumbering, upright version with human proportioned arms. That could involve a Godzilla that walks *on all fours* (so why not remake VARAN THE UNBELIEVABLE?). However, Devlin said it's too early to discuss such details. "Toho controls all rights to the creature, so whatever direction we go, we're going to have to get approval from them. But we are very optimistic they're going to like the direction we're going." ☐

THE FRIGHTENERS
continued from page 9

Jackson concluded, "Universal gave me as much freedom as I wanted... In fact, they've been really great all down the line. They never got heavy with me and have let me do what I want. Zemeckis came over once and never returned until I was ready to show him my final cut. I can't complain about anything: the film is mine; it's got everything in it I wanted; they haven't forced me to cut, change or water anything down; and it pushes weird as far as anything you've ever seen from a mainstream studio before." ☐

LASERBLAST
continued from page 56

or rock formations, titantic insects and arachnids that terrorized and thrilled were new and exciting innovations, then you can't go wrong by giving these boxed sets a berth in your collection. ☐

PINOCCHIO
continued from page 31

ment that was going on peripherally by the puppeteers," he said. "Just as you have to include things as an actor, you also have to exclude things. Very often, I chose not to see things. Still, it's a puppet that's expressive and subtle, lovable, cute, naive... all of those expressions are possible. I joked that I've worked with a lot of wooden actors, and Pinocchio is the best one, which is actually the truth of the matter."

Like the Disney version, Barron is attempting to make THE ADVENTURES OF PINOCCHIO a timeless story that won't feel dated in the years to come. "It's basically a classical approach," said the director. "I don't think the story should be made to fit into today. It's really the first live-action version that's ever been done, with over 340 effects shots. But like all effects films, what it finally comes down to is: Do you care about the characters? I'd say our biggest effect is Pinocchio, because he's the one who has the biggest draw on you emotionally. That's who you ultimately care about." ☐

A CLOSE SHAVE
continued from page 37

box office will stand. I think the good ones will do well, and the bad ones will go off to video. So the pressure is on to make a really good one. TOY STORY has raised the stakes, obviously, because it's fantastic. That's quite a challenge to us, to top TOY STORY!

"Not that we're out to do that," Rose continued. "I'm sure it would be a disaster if we set out to do a blockbuster; it never works. You aim to make the best film possible and hope that people like it. But, whereas before the studio attitude was the 3-D animation could not be as successful as 2-D, TOY STORY has shown that, if you've got a great script, great characterization, and great direction, it can." ☐

THE CROW

continued from page 27

Welcome to Hollywood! Seriously, some of the stuff we did with Vincent was pretty amazing. He did a lot of his own stunts. The final sequence was pretty taxing for him physically. He had to be dragged across the back lot for a couple of evenings. One week, we drowned Vincent on Monday, dragged him across the back lot on Tuesday, hung him on Wednesday, and so it went. It was pretty damn tough for him. He'd never done such a physically exhausting film, and he did it all himself."

The production spent its last six nights of principal photography recreating the Day of the Dead parade on the Universal back lot, which saved money and gave the director control not possible outside studio walls. Pope had originally storyboarded the film, then threw the boards out on location and responded to the environment. After the first cut, the production filmed an additional week of pickups and reshoots in order to fill in some gaps created by sticking to the original shooting schedule. "It's sort of a standard thing now, especially on this kind of a budget," explained McDowell. "They start ripping pages out of the script while shooting, because of the time and money starting to conflict, and then afterwards realize that they need to go back in and reshoot. It seems common to look at the first cut and decide where there are narrative problems, then shoot a little more. I think everyone keeps money aside for that these days. So we're doing a new scene and a couple of inserts."

In post-production, Pope turned his attention to another driving force behind the previous CROW: its industrial strength soundtrack. Nine Inch Nails, The Cure, Helmet, and Pantera had helped to set the film's tone and elaborate on its aesthetic. Pope promises to follow suit with the sounds of CITY OF ANGELS. "I fought hard to get a proper soundtrack," he said. "There are new bands involved, along with some more well-known groups who are writing songs. I thought it was important to carry the idea on from the first film and take some chances with the music. I was personally really sick of those Hollywood movies in the '80s, like TOP GUN, where something happens on the screen and you say, 'Oh, here comes the pop song.' What was interesting about the original CROW was that the music was threaded throughout the texture of the entire movie, and people responded to that. I also believe the soundtrack created a whole audience for the movie that hadn't really been catered to before.

While Ashe (Perez) carries out his mission of revenge, his violent actions against helpless opponents gradually make him seem like less of a hero.

"One of my personal ambitions with this movie," Pope added proudly, "was to use the Iggy Pop song, 'I Wanna Be Your Dog,' which is one of my all time favorite songs. I thought, 'If people hate the movie, at least I've got that in there.' And, of course, we've got Iggy in the movie. He was one of James O'Barr's inspirations in creating The Crow, so it's good to get the grandfather of punk in there."

It was established in THE CROW that the bird is the carrier of the avenger's power. Kill the Crow and you severe the connection to that power. In order to give the second film a third act that wouldn't be mere repetition, David Goyer latched onto the idea that Judah would succeed where Top Dollar had failed. "In the first movie, they wounded the bird," recalled Goyer. "Only three things could happen in this film: you could have the villains try to get the bird and they never do, which is unsatisfying; you could have the villains wound the bird, which I just think is incredibly lame; or you could have the villain who knows the legend deliberately set out to kill the bird and does it. I said, 'You have to kill the bird at the end of the movie.' And we do. To me, it was like 'What then?' That brings us to our climax at the end of the second act.

"The other thing I establish in this story," said Goyer, "is the murder of Crows. A whole flock of Crows show up at the end, representing all the hundreds of thousands of avatars throughout time. Do you remember that old French film, THE RED BALLOON? Remember when the red balloon gets popped and all the other balloons come? That's what we do with the Crows."

While Pressman and company await audience reaction to this new take on THE CROW, preliminary plans are already afoot for another sequel. Because CITY OF ANGELS establishes a precedent for numerous wronged people coming back from the grave, new films could be set any time and any place. Yet THE CROW III will probably extend the continuity of the first two films, in the character of Sarah. Scripter Goyer believes that, in a roundabout way, films are actually her stories, because they are told from her point of view. At the end of the first film, the bird gives Eric and his fiancee's ring to the young Sarah. "It's not just a keepsake, Goyer claimed, "but also a passing of the torch. The second movie is narrated by the adult Sarah, and is arguably her movie in that it's kind of set up for her to become the next Crow. The ending to this film can be taken in a couple of ways."

Talks are also going on for a proposed television series, although no definite plans have been made. Sensing that a single, solitary Crow ravaging his way through season after season could grow old real fast, Goyer offered his two cents on how it should be done. "I've told them the only way they could do it is as an anthology," Goyer says. "Any other way is just idiotic. There could be CROW stories that take place in the Middle Ages, in the future, etc. To me, the interesting thing is how the mantle settles on different people. There should be all manner of different stories."

"Different" has been the key word among those who worked on CITY OF ANGELS—a point emphasized by its director. "We're not doing THE CROW II," Pope insisted. "We're making something completely different, while being responsible to the memory of Brandon Lee. I think the audience for the first film will respond to that." Time will tell whether the filmmakers have succeeded at overcoming the hurdles of making a sequel and created a new approach to the mythos or whether CITY OF ANGELS is just THE CROW II in sodium clothing. □

O'BARR

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ison, if for just a moment. One potential highlight of CITY OF ANGELS, especially for O'Barr, will be the acting of punk rocker Iggy Pop. O'Barr has long been a fan of Pop's music and even painted the fellow Detroit native once. Pop later autographed the back of the painting for the artist.

Pop, who previously appeared in John Waters' CRY BABY, is known for his wild, hyperkinetic stage performances, and O'Barr said that energy carries over into the film. "I wish Brandon would have had a chance to act against him," O'Barr said. "Brandon had this electric presence, and Iggy does as well."

O'Barr said he was very impressed with CITY OF ANGELS' set design, a strong element of the first film as well. "Visually it's really striking," he said, comparing the heavy use of browns and the absence of light to an old Renaissance painting. "The look of it is just amazing."

O'Barr also praised director Tim Pope for including in CITY OF ANGELS some of the humor that got lost in the first film."A lot of the humorous lines, the black humor from the book, are going into this one," he said. "I think Tim Pope is scholarly enough not to put an 'I'll be back' line in there that's going to haunt him for the rest of his days."

But don't take O'Barr's compliments to mean he's given CITY OF ANGELS his blessing. Overall, his sentiments about the project remain...well, ambivalent. "Even though they're gonna splash my name up there, I essentially had nothing to do with it," he said. "If they make a good film, that's great. But if they make a bad film, my hand isn't in it." □

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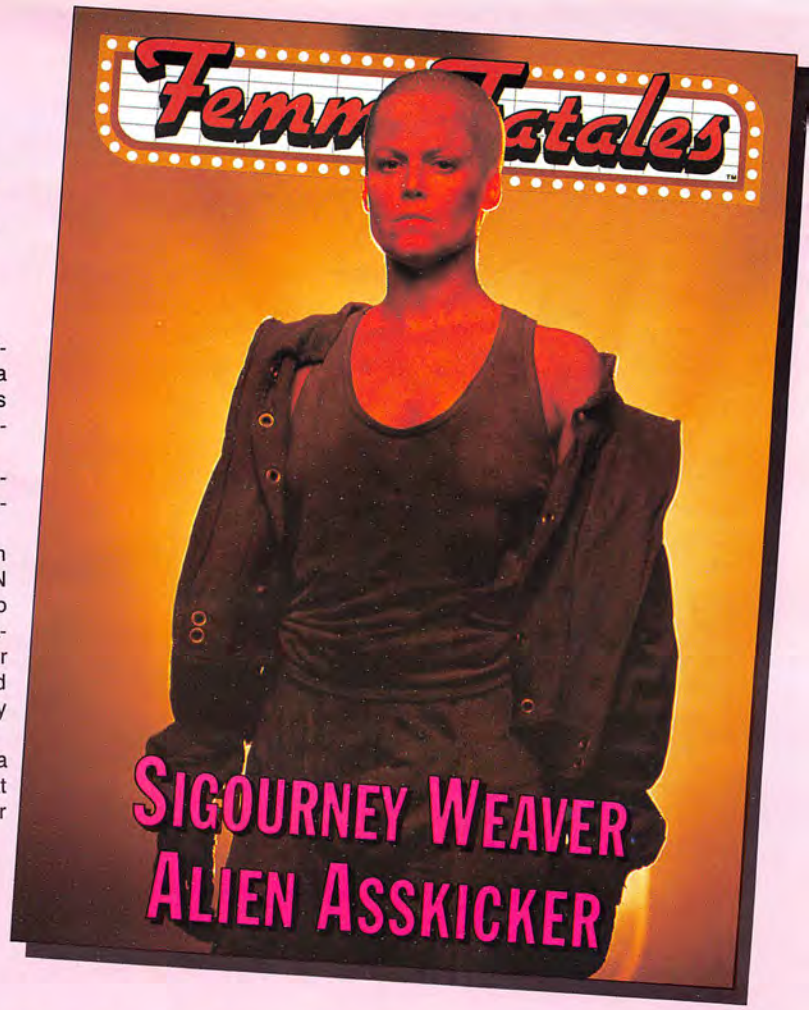
Also in the same issue, our preview of Talisa Soto as VAMPIRELLA, a peek at the Showtime TV-movie-cum-series pilot, plus a revealing look at Heather Elizabeth Parkhurst, the star of SHERMAN OAKS, and a career profile of ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK's Adrienne Barbeau. Order now!



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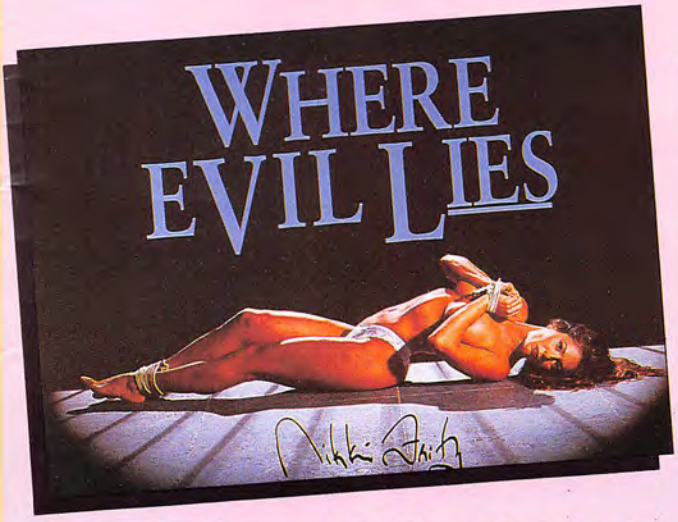

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